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TOM BULLEKELEY

OF LISSINGTON.

A *Nobel*.

BY

R. MOUNTENEY JEPHSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON.

1873.

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249. 9. 589

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TOM BULLEKELEY OF LISSINGTON.

CHAPTER I.

WINE, LOVE, AND SONG.

“Sed convivatoris, uti ducis, ingenuum res
Adversæ nudare solent, celare secundæ.”

Horace.



WE have been doing penance for the last few chapters in having to deal with such unhappy subjects as Purghatorree and Leonard Helstone; and it is with feelings of relief that we take up our pen with the consciousness of its having a pleasanter duty before it than painting the wretchedness and misery of either the one or the other.

It takes a leap from grave to gay, from black darkness to bright sunshine, when it

leaves Leonard Helstone and his repinings, and goes, with ink still wet with the unpleasant task, to bright, cheery little Kit Trevor.

Not Kit Trevor, mind you, as we saw him last, in debt and desponding ; but Kit Trevor, beaming and radiant ! Kit Trevor—words of a joyous signification fail us, so we fall back on his own—"ready to jump out of his skin" with health and happiness.

We could not possibly have paid him a visit on a happier or brighter occasion than on this identical May morning. He was in a delightful glow of anticipation. It was going to be to *him* the brightest, happiest day in all the glad New Year. Not that he was going to be exactly the Queen of the May, for, rather, May was the queen of him. Nor had he, although he had risen betimes, been dependent on his mother for calling him early, that office having been performed as usual by Full Private Swivel, in the usual manner—a shake of the shoulder, and "Tub's ready, sir !" But he was going to bask in the sunshine of the Queen of *his* May—the May of his young life.

Fortune had been smiling kindly on Kit

lately, but on this identical morning she seemed positively to have broken into a broad grin.

Everything had been going on well. First and foremost, an old grand-aunt, whom he did not know, and therefore could not regret, had died just in the nick of time, and left all the long string of little Trevors legacies; and Kit had not only insisted on sending back Tom's hundred and fifty, much against that individual's will, but had also burst out into the dignity of a banking-book.

"Yes, everything had prospered with the little fellow. He was flush of cash; the "gee," as he called his one horse, was as "fit as a fiddle," and held out promise of great things next season; Vic had presented him with a most beautiful litter of puppies, and both mother and children were doing well. In short, everything in the establishment had prospered and multiplied. Kit, generally, represented the prosperity, and Vic the multiplication.

But all these strokes and caresses of fortune, all this run of good luck, seemed to be brought to a culminating point on this happy May day.

It was almost noon, and everything about the tiny quarter wore an air of bustling activity and preparation. Coming events were not casting their shadows over it; but, on the contrary, were bathing it in rays of joyous light.

There was evidently something in the wind. Something very nice and delightful it must have been, and in a wind, too, that was setting straight in the direction of No. 23 Room, Right-hand Block, and No. 23 was not going to be found unprepared for it! It had on a festive garment. Its portable iron bedstead had gone to No. 22, opposite, and a hired sofa reigned in its stead. Its scantily-clothed nymphs who had bathed, or danced on one toe, against its walls were removed, and pretty proprieties, bought expressly for the purpose, substituted. Kit had been as particular as any Lord Chamberlain on the subject. Its mantelpiece scarcely knew itself with vases of bright and sweet-smelling spring flowers upon it. Its portable wash-hand stand had made way for a piano—cleanliness, for the nonce, had ceded place to music—and, most wonderful of all, taking up nearly the

whole of the remainder of the room, was a table covered with snow-white linen, and cut glass and flowers, and hot-house fruits, and dried fruits, and preserves, and all the delicacies, in and out, of the season. Such a spread No. 23 had never seen before. But we said No. 23 was not going to be found unprepared, and No. 23 looked worthy of the occasion. But these were not nearly all the tokens of approaching festivity.

There was Kit in his shirt-sleeves, busily arranging more flowers ; and there was Reginald Brunton, also in his shirt sleeves, making "cup."

There, too, was Mr. Swivel, attired in a gorgeous new livery which did not at all become his style of beauty, bringing in more glasses and more delicacies, and playing himself into the room with a kind of musical jingling, and there was Vic, released for a short time from the cares and duties of maternity, with a bran new collar on !

The reader must be on the tip-toe of expectation to know what all these grand preparations meant, so we shall not withhold the secret any longer.

Kit's father had run down to see him for a few days, and, at the instigation of Tom, Kate Chichester had insisted on his putting up at Lissington, which was also sheltering under its hospitable old roof Fane and Blanche Vereker, on a short visit from Hawley ; and the whole party were going to honour Ensign Christopher Trevor with their company at luncheon.

A few words about Kit's father. He quite deserves them. He was a handsome, mild-looking old man, whose manner, appearance, and speech stamped him at once as an English gentleman, a scholar, and a clergyman, a happy combination commanding the respect of even the thoughtless and giddy. Although leading a pure and blameless life, he mixed freely with the world, and entered into its harmless pleasures and amusements, if they came in his way, with keenness and zest, on the principal of whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing well.

He loved his son, Kit, fondly, and was proud of the little soldier lad. The boy had never done a dishonourable action in his life, and Sir Edward had never laid hands on

him. But though he had spared the rod, he had not spoiled the child. Nevertheless, it must be confessed, Master Kit had been "tickled up" pretty frequently at school.

The guests—to return to Number 23—were as follows :—Mrs. and Miss Chichester ; Colonel and Mrs. Vereker ; the Rev. Sir Edward Trevor ; Tom Bullekeley, who had run over from Hawley expressly for the occasion, directly after parade ; Reggy Brunton, who was to assist in doing the honours, in addition to his other duties as cup-brewer ; and two brother ensigns, invited in return for services rendered on the festive occasion ; Number 24, next door, who had given up his quarter to be converted into a ladies' cloak room ; and Number 22, who was a waif and stray without a habitable home, until the return of Kit's bed and wash-hand stand to their accustomed corners ; making, with Kit himself, a total of ten, and, with the three servants, a grand total of thirteen—a total that threatened to be a great deal *too* grand for, and utterly to swamp, No. 23.

Some such uneasy thought must have occurred to Kit, for he remarked—

"I say, Reggy! I'm afraid it will be a pretty tight fit, eh?"

"Yes, a devil of a squash, and no mistake!" said Brunton, smacking his lips—that cup required a great deal of tasting—"we'll have to sit awfully close to each other."

"Ahem! so we shall—awfully close, yes. I say, where do you think, ah, Miss—ahem! aha!—I mean *Mrs.* Chichester, ought to sit now?"

"Oh, anywhere! The great thing in entertaining in this sort of style is to let people shake down in their own way, and not go fretting yourself about it. Look here, send old 'Right-about-three-quarters-turn' for some more liquor—a couple more bottles of fizz, a couple more claret, some more brandy, and another bottle of curaçoa. There's not half enough cup here. It diminishes so in the making, you see."

There was no doubt Reggy Brunton was a capital brewer of cup, but there must have been some extraordinary compound introduced by him, causing rapid evaporation of the liquids, with the exception of the soda-water which did not appear to be so much

affected by it ; for by the time his brews were ready for general consumption, they always had sunk down to nearly half their proper quantity.

There seemed always to be a sort of tide at work, which was at full ebb when he began the operations, and when he ended, was at low water.

"It's wonderful," he remarked, "what a lot goes in leakage, and wastage, and——"

"Tasteage, you thirsty old sinner, Reggy!" said Kit with a laugh.

"Oh, ay, yes, tasting. Yes, you must allow to a certain extent for that. Tasting in making cup, you see, is much the same as what feeling your way is in marching through an enemy's country. They're precautionary measures, equally, both of them, for providing against failure. If you don't taste, you work in the dark ; for instance, I'm not quite sure about the sugar" (ladling out a tumblerful and sipping). "H'm! a little too much, I think"—(another sip). "I don't know, though—hardly enough, perhaps. One can't taste in these wretched little mouthfuls"—(a pull at it). "H'm! I'm divided in my opinion"

(another and a strong pull). "Something wrong somewhere. Something rotten in the state of Denmark!"

"Lemon peel, perhaps," suggested Kit.

"No, *that's* right enough. I don't think it's the sugar, after all. I think I've shoved in too much curaçoa" (another and a longer pull). "No, it's not the curaçoa, it's the borage. I'm not sure, though" (a strong pull, a long pull, and a pull which leaves nothing at all in the tumbler but the smell). "I don't know, though. I think it's about right. It will do. It will have to be tasted, though, at intervals, to see that it does not deteriorate in any way. Now, Kit, holloa out for old 'Shuffle-up-half-a-pace,' and tell him to look sharp about getting that liquor over from the mess—we shall never have our arrangements completed in time."

Now old "Shuffle-up-half-a-pace" in the last paragraph, and old "Right-about-three-quarters-turn" a few paragraphs back, were names invented on the spot for Mr. Swivel, and modelled on the principles adopted by the old Puritans, who christened themselves with long-sounding combinations of Biblical

words and phrases, such as—"Captain Hew-Agag-in-pieces-before-the-Lord," or "Sergeant Throw-down-the-mighty-from-their-seats," with this difference, that whereas the Puritans drew their designatory materials from the Bible, Brunton drew *his* from Mr. Swivel's bible, the drill-book.

He hardly ever repeated the same name, but conferred a new one every time, all drawn from the same source, and all fitting the military stiltedness of Mr. Swivel's general behaviour and appearance to a nicety, and as this example was followed pretty generally throughout the regiment, Full Private Swivel, if he could have enlisted afresh under each new name that was bestowed on him, would not only have amassed a pretty large fortune in bounty-money, but would have become a mighty host in himself, quite a strong battalion—*on paper*.

In obedience to Reggy, who was a regular despot in his department, Swivel obtained the renewed supply of liquids; the cup was completed, even to its brewer's satisfaction, and the arrangements proceeded smoothly, with the exception of the temporary inconveni-

ences occasioned by a fixed idea that had taken root in Mr. Swivel's mind, that the piano was a new and highly-ornamented cupboard, a species of *buffet*, intended for the safe and cool custody of articles of food, until such time as they should be wanted. No amount of explanation could disabuse his mind of this; not even a performance of "God save the Queen," with one finger by Brunton, could dispel the illusion, and veal pies and cold chickens were every now and again missing, and then being dug up from its recesses, to which they invariably returned in a few minutes, when neither Kit nor Reggy Brunton were on the look-out.

There had been a council of war held on the previous day as to the advisability of dispensing with Mr. Swivel's services on the occasion, but the objection to him had at last been overruled by Brunton, who held that he would be "half the fun of the fair," and, after all, could not do *much* damage with one of the new waiters, and his own servant to keep an eye on him.

"What made the Captain of his company send him as a servant, I wonder?" asked

Brunton, as he and Kit were at work extricating sundry articles of light confectionary from the interior of the piano.

“Well, I believe Barret was anxious to get him out of the ranks as soon as possible, for you see he’s so awfully smart, that he makes the rest of the men look like an awkward squad of recruits. You can spot him in the company a mile away by his martial bearing. So when I joined, and was posted to the company, they sent the old image to me. I’ve got accustomed to him now. In fact, I wouldn’t part with him for anything ; but I know he’d drive some fellows wild in a week.”

“So I should think,” said Brunton, disengaging a small jam tart from the strings. “The tones of this old instrument ought to be pretty sweet after this.”

This last article having been resuscitated, there was now nothing more to be done but for Kit and Brunton to complete their toilets, and then to wait for the arrival of the guests.

With Kit the time dragged along on leaden wings, but it went quicker with Brunton, who beguiled it with frequent visits to the cup, to

discover, and at once nip in the bud, any deterioration that might be setting in.

“’Pon my soul, Reggy, you’ll be squiffy before we sit down to lunch, if you don’t let that cup alone!”

“No, you’re quite mistaken, Kit, my boy. I know its nature thoroughly. It’s *the* identical *cup* that cheers, but *not* inebriates. I shall be cheered, not inebriated, and the more I drink, the more cheered, cheery, cheerful, and amusing I shall become, without verging towards inebriation. So it’s in your interest, as host, to induce me to drink as much as possible, if you want to secure the services of an amusing and agreeable young man for your small luncheon party!”

While Kit and Brunton thus waited above, Swivel, in obedience to an order from his master to be “on the look-out,” seated himself on a form outside, and watched with much interest a batch of recruits at drill. This was a favourite amusement of his. Next to drilling himself, he liked to see others at it; and of all kinds of drill, that which afforded him most pleasure as a spectacle, was recruits’ drill. It was so soothing

and delightful to look down on their mistakes and awkward blunders from his own pinnacle of perfection. The recruit drill Sergeant was himself worth looking at. There never was such a tyrant as this Sergeant. He was in a perpetual passion ; he was always red in the face, except when he became purple, and was rampant and ranting, bellowing and blatant all day—and all night too, we suppose, for it was impossible that such a storm as was always raging during the day could subside in one night ; but as he was not heard during the still hours, the Drum-Major must have muffled him as he did the big drum for a funeral, and then taken the muffler off at *reveillée*, for his voice was heard the first thing in the morning at it again. His favourite position was in the middle of the barrack square, feet a little apart, hands crossed behind him toying with a rattan, chest stuck out, and head thrown a little back, roaring out his words of command with such a rolling of his Rs, and such a peculiar intonation in his voice, and such a ferocious glare, that the stoutest recruit trembled at the very sight of him. His powers of invective

tive were great, of sarcasm, perhaps greater ; in fact, so terribly did he wield this last weapon of speech that he must have occupied some time of the night in the muffler concocting and sharpening up these wordy daggers. There was no limit to his terrors ; nothing could stop him. He was not allowed by the rules of the service to hit the men, but he had a way of whizzing his rattan within a hair's breadth of their noses that was quite as disconcerting to their nerves ; and then, if a recruit required dressing up or dressing back, there was no objection to giving him a smart tap before or behind, as the occasion might demand. And then, again, although he could not well curse at the top of his voice in the middle of the square—at least not *very* much—yet he had such a knack of hissing his words between his teeth that it put a sort of twist on them, so that although they may have left his mouth in the form of a blessing, by the time they reached the object they were something quite the reverse. It was terrible, too, the way in which he would roar out, “Not-a-move ! R-r-r-right or w-r-r-r-ong, not-a-m-o-o-ve!!!” when some unlucky wight had

made a mistake, and then rush across the square at him in so savage a manner that an uninitiated bystander would feel inclined to interpose between him and the delinquent, to avert murder. It was fearful, too, to see him pull up in his savage rush, only just in the nick of time to prevent his inflamed nose from gouging one of the wretched man's eyes out, and then, after scathing him with a long glare, retire backwards, still keeping his eyes on his victim, and preserving a silence which made the whole proceeding more awful, until he got back to his position in the middle of the square, when he would let out such a torrent of abuse that it was wonderful how the wretched man it was hurled at was ever able to "stand at ease" again. Oh, it was all terrible!

This Sergeant was a great hero in the eyes of Mr. Swivel, who was never tired of watching him licking the recruits into shape, which, to give him his due, he certainly did in an incredibly short space of time. As he was more than usually down on his squad this afternoon, Mr. Swivel, as he sat on his bench, supposed to be on the "look-out" for

his master's guests, became more than ever wrapt in admiration for the great man ; and the more he watched the more interested he became in his sayings and doings, so that the minutes of expectation which crawled along so slowly with his master passed quickly and pleasantly with him.

Exactly as the hands of the barrack clock pointed to twenty-three minutes and a half to two, Kit Trevor's heart came up into his mouth, and Mr. Swivel's wooden countenance broke into a heavy, but still appreciative smile ; for simultaneously at that moment a wagonette entered the barrack gate, and the long string of recruits suddenly tied itself into a hopeless state of entanglement. It is needless to specify which of the two circumstances stirred respectively the heart of master and man.

"Here they are !" exclaimed Kit, with a wild flutter, as he caught a glimpse of a fair little face.

"Not-a-move ! R-r-r-right or w-r-r-r-ong, not-a-mo-o-o-ve !" roared the drill Sergeant, as he swooped down on his prey.

"He-he ! I never see such a go," chuckled

Mr. Swivel, as he settled the two wooden forms—his own and the one he was sitting on—into better position for seeing and listening.

On came the wagonette, containing, as of course it did, the whole party from Lissington Towers, and, piloted by Tom, it drove up opposite to No. 23 room. As the party alighted, Kit was thrown into such a state of fluster by the contemplation of a little figure in a light blue and white striped dress, that he quite lost his presence of mind, and danced about between the window and the door, and the door and the window, in a painful state of indecision whether to rush down stairs and receive his guests with open arms, or to wait for them where he was.

“What the devil is Swivel about, that he doesn’t show them up?” he said, peeping out of the window.

“What’s up with old ‘Wait-for-the-last-sound-of-the-bugle?’” said Brunton, peeping out of the other.

But Mr. Swivel neither moved nor stirred. He was too engrossed with the other scene to have noticed anything else.

"All right; come along!" said Tom. "It's somewhere in this block, I know. Come along, Colonel!"

As the mystic sound "Colonel" fell upon Mr. Swivel's ear, something seemed to touch a spring somewhere about his heels, and send him shooting up to "attention." He then hastened to do his master's bidding, and to show the guests the way.

Being anxious to get rid of the party as soon as possible, in order not to lose any of the thrilling spectacle going on in the square, and, having his mind still running on it, his first act was to show them all into a room on the ground floor, in which its occupant, the junior Ensign, was refreshing himself with a mid-day tub, after the fatigues of a two-hours' drill. On this, the unhappy boy, with ostrich-like instinct, held his sponge before his face and groaned, while the party tumbled over each other into the passage in dire confusion.

Kit soon came to their rescue, however, and conducted them upstairs, amidst a great deal of suppressed laughter, which broke out more openly when the ladies were by them-

selves in No. 24, taking of their "things," and the gentlemen were by *themselves* in No. 23 ; and Mr. Swivel, if only for the absurdity of the thing, was forgiven by every one, except the unfortunate youth with the ostrich like instinct, who blushed, even in his sleep, for a fortnight afterwards, and refused to be comforted.

And when the ladies came in, and Kit informed the whole party of the hallucination under which Mr. Swivel laboured with regard to the piano, there were such shouts of laughter from every one—particularly when May detected one solitary jam tart in the interior of the instrument—that it appeared, after all, that Mr. Swivel, instead of bringing utter disgrace and failure on the whole entertainment, was turning out its most brilliant and amusing feature, and was indeed proving, as Brunton had predicted, "half the fun of the fair."

Kit's duties as host were not trying. Every one was not only determined to be pleased, but was *really* so, from force of circumstances. The little room had such a holiday look on, that it was impossible to be

gloomy in it, and No. 23, for those few hours, had succeeded in compressing into its small space as much jollity and happiness as could be contained in a gilded saloon of the most magnificent proportions.

Every one was pleased and happy.

Kate Chichester was pleased, as it was only her nature to be when she saw every one else so.

Kit's father was pleased, and beamed on his boy with a benevolence that was bound to break out into a "tip" sooner or later, or as Reggy Brunton said afterwards, he had a "tippical look about him the whole time."

Blanche Vereker was pleased and happy, without knowing in the least the deadly cup she was holding to her lips. Make the most of it, Blanche, while it lasts, for it's a happiness with a terribly rotten foundation !

May was pleased, as she always was when in Kit's company, for she was "so amused, and liked looking at that funny pretty little Mr. Trevor."

Tom was pleased—of course he was ; there is no necessity to record *that*, and his hand-

some face lit up with good humour, was enough to illuminate half-a-dozen No. 23's.

Fane Vereker was pleased—there was no help for it.

Reggy Brunton was decidedly pleased, for, as he himself said, "when the liquor was good, and the company was to match, *he* was not the man to complain." Of the former he had thoroughly satisfied himself, and of the latter there could be no doubt whatever.

The two Ensigns, Nos. 24 and 22, though hot and shy, were also pleased. And as to Kit himself, there could be no doubt about *his* unalloyed pleasure.

"What a dear little room!" said May. "Is yours at Hawley bigger, Tom?"

"Oh, yes! then I'm bigger than Kit, you see," replied Tom.

"But that doesn't make any difference, does it?"

"Of course it does. You get a room served out to fit you."

"Yes," said Brunton, "it's the case, Miss Chichester. The first thing to be done on joining a regiment is to get measured for your room."

"Do you *really*?" said May, innocently. "Well I never knew *that*. Of course that accounts, then, for this being such a tiny little one."

"Don't believe a word of it, Miss Chichester!" said Kit, vehemently. "They wouldn't give me a bigger one than this if I were sixteen feet high, and had to sleep with my head up the chimney, and my feet hanging out of the window."

"By the way, where *do* you sleep—not being sixteen feet high? I don't see any signs of a sleeping arrangement," said Blanche Vereker, laughingly.

No. 22 looked as if he could a tale, as well as a turn-up bedstead, unfold, but was too shy to make the disclosure, so he wriggled and smiled with a consciousness of the weighty secret; while Tom said—

"Really, you've touched upon a very painful subject, particularly in the presence of Sir Edward, too. It's very shocking, certainly, but the fact is, that our young friend here is of such a wide-awake and convivial disposition that he never goes to bed at all."

"Well, he must sleep somewhere or somehow," said Blanche Vereker, "or he wouldn't look so rosy."

"Blanche," said Fane, reprovingly.

"Well, so he does look rosy, doesn't he, May?" persisted Blanche.

Under the thrilling operation of being raked fore and aft by the artillery of May's bright eyes, Kit became such a roseate spectacle of blushes that, whatever doubts there might have been before about his complexion, there could not be the shadow of one now.

"Confound it! I'm afraid I'm blushing," thought Kit. "I think we had better have lunch," he added aloud. "Now, the first think to be done is to take our places, for the servants can't get round the table unless we do. Mrs. Chichester, will you sit there? Mrs. Vereker, will you—ahem! It's so hard to move about, I think you had better all sit down in the places in front of you."

Oh, wise, discriminating youth! that *was* a stroke of generalship, for at that moment May Chichester happened to be standing at the corner of the table nearest to him.

Kit's little *ruse* was quite successful. May sat next to him, and all the rest soon settled down, Tom and Fane Vereker, as possessing the longest bodies, being accommodated on the hired sofa, which, in accordance with those strict rules of economy of space necessary to be observed on the occasion, was made to do duty at one side of the table.

Before calling in the servants, Kit thought it as well to prepare his guests for any little eccentricities Mr. Swivel might be betrayed into, by letting them into the secret that this was his first appearance in the character of waiter.

"I don't believe, myself, he's human," said Reggy Brunton, who considered himself bound to back Kit up in every way. "I assure you, Miss Chichester," he said, as May turned her large wondering eyes full upon him, "there's a great deal of timber in his composition, and it's generally believed in the regiment that his clothes and accoutrements are fastened on to him with tacks and nails, like the bridles and trappings of rocking horses."

"It's a fact, May," said Tom, "and what

you would take for buttons are in reality the heads of nails and screws ; and when there's a nail or a screw loose, he retires to a corner, and adjusts his toilet with the aid of a hammer and a screw-driver, just as you might use pins and laces, you know."

"Don't be tiresome, Tom ! *Do* have him in at once, Mr. Trevor. I'm dying to have a long stare at him."

Upon this, Kit summoned the attendants, and the joyous repast proceeded onwards without a hitch. Or if there *were* little hitches now and again, such as when the table—in reality two placed together—opened in the middle, like a small earthquake of Lisbon, and swallowed up two glasses and a dish before their very eyes ; or when the hired sofa collapsed under the combined weight of two such heavy swells as Fane and Tom, they only added to the general amusement, and were incidents more to be welcomed than dreaded.

Nothing came amiss. Everything was turned to account for the general delectation. Even the tables were. After their disunion they persistently refused to re-unite, but their

differences were hidden by the table-cloth, which, when artfully re-adjusted by Tom and one of the ensigns opposite, lay smooth, white, and treacherous as the snow-drift over the yawning *crévasse*, and offered to Mr. Swivel a pitfall that he never failed to fall into as often as it was made for him. Learning nothing whatever from experience, he devoted dish after dish to an untimely end, leaving a record of each exploit conspicuously emblazoned on the table-cloth.

Many a furtive and amused glance was cast at him as he stood—when not engaged as above—rigidly at attention, with a movement of his head and neck as if he in vain sought the soothing stock, and a twitching of the fingers as if they itched to grasp the butt of a rifle. In addition to these peculiarities, he was a free perspirer, and a hard breather.

“Dear me! how quickly the time is going,” said May, paying a delicate, but unintentional, compliment to the lively little host, who had been chatting almost without cessation ever since they sat down.

“Isn’t it?” replied Kit. “I think I’ll get

some one to put the barrack clock back. If we had Molter here now, Bullekeley, he'd be just the man, wouldn't he?"

"Oh, don't talk about that," said Blanche Vereker. "I never can think of the whole thing without a shudder. It was *too* awful! When I look at you sitting there, Tom, I can't help thinking what a different ending there might have been, and I sometimes picture to myself the fearful——"

"Well, why go drawing fearful pictures? Misfortunes come quite often enough in reality, without drawing on your imagination for them, Blanche," said Fane Vereker, tossing off his "cup" just a little savagely. It was not a pleasant sight for him to see that fair face flushing at the thought of any man's peril but his. Besides, the familiar "Tom" always jarred on him, although it was addressed to an old friend, almost a brother.

"What was it all about, though? Tom has never told us anything of it," said Mrs. Chichester.

"Yes," echoed May. "*Do* tell us, Blanche, we've never heard a word of it."

"Didn't you? Haven't you?" said

Blanche, quite disregarding poor Tom's efforts to "pooh-pooh" the whole thing. "Well, I'll tell you all about it," and with colour that came and went fifty times in the narration, she told them everything she had seen and heard that morning after the ball, from the time when she saw Molter come out of the "Rookery," up to the moment when Fane was awakened by the cheers of the men, much to Tom's embarrassment, and his sister's and niece's edification.

"Why, you never told me all this before," said Fane. "What was I doing all the time?"

"Oh! *you* were——" "snoring," Blanche was going to say, but just a shadow of a pained look flitted across Fane's face, and made her, with a softer tone in her face, change it to "asleep, Fane, and I didn't like to awake you."

Soon after this there was a pause—about the first one that had occurred, but still a pause—one of those silences that will occur in the best regulated parties, and for some moments nothing broke the stillness but the hard breathing of Mr. Swivel, and the voice

of the terrible drill Sergeant as it was wafted on the afternoon breeze up from the square below through the open window, in various forms of command, invective, and abuse.

It was during these quiet moments that Dame Nature—at times an unpleasant practical joker—whispered into Mr. Swivel's ear, "You're very thirsty, Mr. Swivel! Swivel, you're dry! That iced cup in that tumbler on the side-table looks refreshing, doesn't it, Swivel? Its smell is delicious! It's warm, Swivel! Just a sip of that, and you'd feel all the better! No one could see you, if you did it quickly! I've bestowed a capacious gullet upon you, and it would be down before you could say Jack Robinson, or any one see you!"

Mr. Swivel opened his large ears very wide to the voice of Nature, and then he opened his large mouth, and prepared to obey her promptings. Yes, he succumbed to the temptation, and it is casting no slur upon him as a military machine to say that he did, for all machines—from a coffee-grinder up to the one at the Bank, which turns out hundreds of thousands of pounds in bank-notes

in an hour—are thirsty contrivances, and if they don't get their oil regular, will creak and squeal for it in the most heartrending manner, and perhaps strike work altogether.

He cast one last look round to assure himself that no eye was upon him, and taking advantage of the passing cover afforded by a fellow-servant crossing—a lesson taught him by his military education—he stretched out his hand to the glass, which then went *up* with a celerity only equalled by the rapidity with which its contents went *down*.

The last few delicious drops of the nectar were still on their way from the glass to the lips when

“Like a silver clarion”—

No, with all apologies to Mr. Longfellow for the mutilations,

“Like a brazen trombone rung,
The accents of that well-known tongue,”

as it roared out to the recruits below at drill,
“R-r-r-right or wr-r-r-ong—not a m-o-o-ve!”

The effect on Mr. Swivel was magical—the words seemed to turn him to stone. There was *not* a move in him, but rigid and

fixed as the Russian Drum Major in Madame Tussaud's, he stood with the glass up to his lips, until a consciousness of being the centre of all observation broke the spell, and he retreated in confusion, making spasmodic attempts to salute, followed by the two other servants, who were in that state, afterwards described by themselves as "well nigh bustin' their precious sides."

Nothing else particularly worthy of being chronicled happened during this memorable luncheon, except, perhaps, that two iced forms which were to have crowned the feast, made their appearance, resembling in substance and temperature hot soup, having been brought fresh from the oven, where they had been carefully placed by Mr. Swivel, feverishly anxious to make amends for his last little *faux pas*, and in a state of virtuous indignation against the mess cooks for "sendin' them puddens over stone cold."

Here again Swivel achieved a brilliant success, and "brought down the house" for the third time. Many a host would have been seriously put out by this succession of *contretemps*, but not in the least so was Kit.

On the contrary, he laughed louder and longer over each exploit than anyone else ; and as old Sir Edward joined in the laugh at this last reverse, he could not help muttering to himself, as he looked at his boy's merry face, the quotation from Horace at the head of this chapter.

"Now, Miss Chichester, *do* let's have some music," said Kit, invitingly opening the piano as soon as the meal was over, and brushing from the keys sundry flakes of pastry.

"I haven't got any music," replied May.

"I rather think," said Tom, "I've heard that remark before from young ladies on similar occasions."

"Well, if it's not original, at all events it's true, Tom," replied May, with just a shadow of a pretty little pout. "I *haven't* any music!"

"But *I* have," said Kit.

What a little host it was! Nothing had been forgotten. There, piled up on the portable chest of drawers, was every song or piece of dance music he had ever heard May mention.

"There, Miss Chichester! No excuse *now*!"

May sat down, and played and sang, the very walls of No. 23 seeming to get closer, as if they wanted to listen. Then Blanche Vereker sang, and then they took to Christy's Minstrels, all taking their turns at it, and joining in the chorus with right good will. None of them, however, in point of expression and *verve*, came up to that worthy divine, and able author of many valuable metaphysical and theological treatises, Sir Edward Trevor, who expressed his intention to "bet his money on the bob-tailed nag," with an apparent determination that would have horrified the bishop, scandalised the rural dean, shocked the curate, and raised hopes in the bosom of Mr. Samuel Mossom that the reverend gentleman was about to plunge wildly into a career of betting, and that he would have him on his books before long. And the ardour with which he requested Susannah to come out by "de gaslight ob de moon," was only to be equalled by the fervour of his invitation to Sally to "come up de middle," or the amount of slyness he threw into the assurance that the "ole man he'd gone up to town."

"The dear old governor, isn't he an old brick? Makes the pace too slow, though, with his *con expressione*, doesn't he?" whispered Kit to Tom, as the "old brick" in question lingered with tender pathos for such a time over his farewell to his darling Nellie, who was sleeping in the Hazel dell, that it was positively agonising to those singers who felt bound to wait upon him, but had, unfortunately, taken in their temporary supply of breath at the wrong time.

"He's such a hearty old boy," continued Kit, in his whisper to Tom, as they both, with Brunton, looked over the same piece of music. "He does his best at whatever he goes in for, no matter whether it's pitching into us miserable sinners from the pulpit, or——"

"Pitching into my cup," whispered Brunton, sacrificing truth to smartness.

"If he's as good as he looks," said Tom, in the same whisper, "he's a rare lot."

"So he is. He's both a good 'un to look at and a good 'un——"

"Now then, Kit, my boy!" broke in the subject of all their panegyric, "I don't hear your voice. 'All a-l-o-o-ne my v-o-o-ice

I'm'—Oh, I beg your pardon! I mean my 'w-a-a-tch I'm k-e-e-e-ping,' &c."

When they had had enough of singing, the next thing on the programme was a visit to Vic and her young family.

"Isn't she a little beauty? She's one of the Tartar breed!" said Kit, patting Vic affectionately; while Vic, herself, cocked her little head, pricked up her ears, and looked quite proud of her illustrious ancestor, Tartar.

"Is she? she looks it," said May, who, under the early tuition of old Walters and Tom, knew all about it.

"Would you like one of the pups, Miss Chichester?" asked Kit, tenderly.

"Oh yes, *so* much; they're little beauties."

"Well, you shall have *first* choice. Would you like much of its tail bitten off?" he asked in still more tender accents, as they stooped down together over the descendants of the illustrious Tartar.

Oh! what an ennobling, soul-elevating, poetry-evoking thing is young, ardent love!

"No, not much—about *that* much."

"Very well, I'll recollect."

"Oh, thanks!" And May took off a little

blue riband which had been fluttering about her dress, and tied it round Vic's neck. "There, I declare it's quite becoming!"

Vic seemed, from her frantic attempts to divest herself of the ornament, to prefer beauty unadorned.

Unhappy little dog! Condemned for months to do penance with that piece of riband round your neck, sometimes tripping you up in the most exciting chases, sometimes fluttering into your eyes, sometimes affording a hold for an enemy—canine or human—to drag you by; and sometimes, when expecting ease in the bosom of your family, offering to your youthful progeny a tempting and convenient—for *them* not for *you*—plaything to lay on to, and shake, and worry with the early-developed instinct, befitting scions of the noble house of Tartar.

What was it to you but an instrument of torture? Men might think a good deal of a bit of blue riband, and sigh and hanker after it. *You* did not! No use your looking imploringly at your young master; much as he liked you, he would almost as soon have whipped off your sagacious little head with


his sword, as undone the knot which had been tied by those little lithe fingers. No use appealing to Swivel, it was as much as his place was worth to have disobeyed orders on this point.

After Vic and the pups had been "thoroughly done," the party adjourned to the one-stalled residence of that renowned steed "Jack-of-all-trades," where, in the cause of love and friendship, they one and all perjured themselves by professing an admiration which that animal could never have inspired in any breast but that of an owner, but which was swallowed with avidity and gratification by Kit, who, albeit a capital judge of a horse for his years, was, *in re* Jack-of-all-trades, suffering from the blindness consequent on proprietorship.

By this time the hands of the inexorable barrack clock pointed to half-past five, and the wagonette was ordered round ; but Kit's day of happiness was not over yet, for he was borne off—together with Brunton and "their things,"—in the closely-packed wagonette, in thrilling proximity to May, to dine and finish up the evening at Lissington Towers.

CHAPTER II.

DAVID AND JONATHAN.

HAT *man shall love* is as fixed and undeviating a rule of nature as that man shall walk on legs, or bread-and-butter always fall on its buttered side. A human being could as easily go through this world feet uppermost, as he could get through life without loving somebody, or something. It need not be sexual love. It need not be even love for a fellow-creature. There is no depth in the animal scale to which human affections, in the abnormal absence of everything higher, will not descend. But, like ivy, they *must* have *something* to wind round and cling to.

Every one knows the story of that pri-

soner, who, isolated for years from his fellow-creatures, and having no other object for his affections, fixed them on a mouse ; and every one is familiar with the case of the old maid, who gives up man when she finds he won't come forward, as a worthless, deceitful, and treacherous animal, and bestows her love on tabbies, parrots, or plethoric little dogs. No matter what, there must be something to lay hold of.

So, Pennell Gwyn, finding it not in his nature to love woman, and not being isolated from his fellow-creatures, and obliged to fall back upon a mouse, and having a soul above tabbies and dogs, filled up the void in his heart with his affection for Tom, whom he loved with a love passing that of women—"for dress and admiration," *he* would have added, if he, himself, had made the comparison.

He not only liked him with that strong feeling of attachment which is often more equable and even between man and man, than between man and woman ; but he threw into the scale the whole of that love that might have been given to some woman, had he been differently constituted.

The feeling was reciprocated—though, of course, in a lesser degree—and, though Tom's friends were numerous, and amongst them were to be found many fast and true ones; still, Pennell Gwyn stood undoubtedly at the head of the list.

They had taken to each other from the first; and their friendship, like many a lasting and sincere one, had commenced in a quarrel which, although it made two friends, might have deprived her Majesty of the services of two promising young officers.

It was when Gwyn was a young lieutenant in C troop, and the proud owner of a redoubtable dog named "Bill;" and Tom was a young cornet in F troop, and the equally proud owner of an equally redoubtable dog called "Rattler," that the important event occurred.

Bill was the pride of C; Rattler was the axis around which the sporting proclivities of F troop revolved.

Bill and Rattler, although themselves in a perpetual state of eagerness for the fray, had never met in conflict to decide the momentous question, which was the better dog.

The adherents on both sides shrunk from a course involving so mighty a result, although each party was loud in the expression of its confidence in its champion.

At last, one fine day, which broke bright and serene, as any other fine day, not pregnant with such mighty events, might have done, the two enemies found themselves, at about five in the afternoon, face to face near the barrack racquet court, where their masters were having a friendly "rubber."

"What mighty contests rise from trivial things!"

In one moment they had grappled. In another, the men of C and F troops seemed to spring out of the ground, so prompt was their appearance on the scene, and clustered round in an excited, shouting ring, while Gwyn, on one side, encouraged the warlike Bill; and Tom, on the other, stimulated, by voice and gesture, the valiant Rattler to mighty efforts.

Every one felt the day had come!

For a long time the fight raged furiously, but evenly; until, at last, the tide of battle surged to where Gwyn was standing, and,

with his leg, he pushed the combatants more into the centre of the ring.

The dog he touched happened to be Rattler.

Tom fired up. Every one who ever possessed anything with a tail and a bark, knows the feeling.

"You kicked my dog, sir!" said young Tom, with his eyes flashing.

"I didn't!" retorted Gwyn, angrily. "My dog is quite able to thrash yours without any assistance from me, I can tell you!"

"Well, if you touch him again," said Tom, "I'll take his part in something besides words!"

"Do!" replied Gwyn, although a cool hand for a youngster, *now* thoroughly roused. "*Do*, and I shall be delighted of the opportunity!" and the two hot-headed boys glared furiously at each other.

Just at this crisis, a fist, in the Bill interest, came into sudden, but, it is to be feared, designed contact with an eye, the apple of which, so to speak, was Rattler: whereupon, the fists, generally, of C troop played on the countenances of F, while those of F coun-

tered with rapidity and dexterity on the physiognomies of C.

In two words, there was a "free fight."

The uproar was at its height. Men laying about them, cursing ; dogs yelping, snarling, and growling, as they rolled over each other ; while Tom and Gwyn stood face to face in the centre, on the verge of personal combat.

In another second, nothing could have saved them from trial by court-martial, when the fighting and shouting of the men ceased, the ring opened as if by magic, and a figure on horseback rode up to where Tom and Gwyn were standing.

"Go to your rooms, both of you !" said a voice, which, though quiet and passionless, carried command in its tones.

They turned, and saw Fane Vereker, then the senior captain of the regiment.

"But, Vereker, listen !" said Gwyn.

"Look here, Vereker !" said Tom, excitedly.

"Not a word, either of you ! You'll have to give your explanations for this scene to the Commanding Officer, not to me. Get

away at once to your rooms! You're both under close arrest!"

Tom and Gwyn went off, while Fane turned to the crowd, and said,

"I've a devilish good mind to march the whole lot of you prisoners to the guard-room. More like a set of howling savages than a lot of English soldiers. Here, separate these dogs!"

No one was specified, so no one stirred at first.

"Go and get a bucket of water!"

In a moment a dozen buckets full of water were in readiness.

"Now!" said Vereker, to a lusty young private, and pointing to Bill, "take hold of that dog's tail!"

The young trooper obeyed, as he would have striven to do had Vereker told him to go to the devil and catch hold of *his* tail.

"Now," said Vereker, jumping off his horse, and taking Rattler in rear, "Dash that water sharply into their faces!"

The water was thrown, and as the two dogs, half blinded and astonished, opened their mouths for a moment to gasp, they

were torn asunder and swung round by their tails in opposite directions.

"There," said Vereker, "take them away ; and don't let them get together again !"

As he rode off, he murmured to himself, "Those young beggars will catch it pretty hot from the chief, and they'll deserve what they get. I'm not surprised at young Bulkeley ; he's rather a hot 'un, but I am at young Gwyn, there's more ballast in him than in most youngsters. It would never have done to have 'shopped' all those non-commissioned officers and men, though they richly deserved it !"

Yes, although Vereker had told them that he had a "good mind" to make prisoners of them all, he never had had the slightest intention of doing so. He had seen at a glance that it would never have done to have placed officers and men in the same category of error, so the former alone were singled out for punishment.

There are times when it is wiser to look over than to punish, circumstances under which it is better that justice should not be evenhanded ; or, farther still, that her uplifted

arm should be stayed altogether, and the power of being able at *once* to detect and recognise these times and circumstances is a faculty few possess, the gift of being able to command men.

The rider who has the most control over his horse is the one with the *finest*, not the *strongest*, hands. Fane Vereker had the gift, and mainly to it he owed, in after years, his position of being in command of the smartest cavalry regiment in the service ; and not only because he was dashing and gallant in the field, or because he had often led it to the "jaws of hell" as coolly as he ever led a charge in the Long Valley at Aldershot afterwards. These may go a great way, but there are many years of peace, and an officer, when he wants to show what a good soldier he is, cannot always have a few shotted guns, or a squadron of enemy's cavalry handy, to charge.

Captain Fane Vereker rode on his way, while the two young subalterns, with his "Go to your rooms, both of you!" still ringing unpleasantly in their ears, retired to their quarters.

Gwyn had been in his room about ten minutes, when there was a knock at his door.

"Come in," said Gwyn. "It's the adjutant come for my sword, I suppose," he thought.

The door opened, and Tom entered.

What ! was that quarrelsome young black-guard, Tom, so bent on fighting that he even followed his adversary to his room ? And was that bloodthirsty Gwyn so ready for the fray that he could not wait for Tom to come where he was, but must stride across the room to meet him ? Not a bit of it !

"I say, Bullekeley ! What fools we were. Ha, ha, ha !"

"Weren't we, Gwyn, old fellow ? Ha, ha, ha !" and they both shook hands heartily, and then threw themselves into chairs, and laughed for ten minutes.

"Oh, Lor !" said Tom, holding his sides, "every time I think of the whole thing, it kills me ! Old Rattler and Bill going it like steam engines, the men wiring into each other, and you and I almost biting each other's noses off !"

"It was a regular scrimmage," laughed Gwyn.

"Wasn't it? I wonder what's become of Rattler and old Bill?" said Tom. "I say, do you think Vereker will report us?"

"Sure to," said Gwyn. "I know him better than you do. He is a good fellow, but what he says he'll do, he does; and he's not likely to let a thing of this kind pass, and right enough, too."

There was another knock at the door, and *this* time it *was* the Adjutant.

"I say, Gwyn, you're a nice fellow! I've come for your sword. Vereker has ordered me to place you and—hulloa! what are *you* doing here? You ought to be in your room, Bullekeley!"

"Well, I'm going," said Tom. "Bye-bye, Gwyn! I suppose I'll see *you* presently?"

"Yes," replied the Adjutant, "I'll pay you a visit next. I shall be going about like Nelson's coxswain at Trafalgar."

The following day at the orderly-room, in presence of the assembled officers of the regiment, Gwyn and Bullekeley were paraded, and the Colonel performed the feat known in military circles as "going down their throats, spurs and all." He came up again, though,

much more easily than he went down, and before releasing them from arrest and dismissing them, he said, "Now that will do! Go away, and I hope you young gentlemen won't bear any malice towards each other."

"Malice, sir?" said Gwyn; "not we!"

"I should think not, sir!" said Tom, and the two friends walked away arm-in-arm.

The old Colonel looked after them with a different expression on his face, and said to the Major, "Two as fine young fellows as there are in the regiment. *Malice!* Not they. I dare say now they'll be sworn friends."

Right you were, sir! Sworn friends they were from that day, and even Bill and Rattler entered into a friendly alliance.

Ever since then, the only difference Gwyn and Tom ever had in the long course of the friendship, was when the former chose to inveigh, with greater bitterness than usual, against women, and Tom would stand up as their champion. But lately, ever since that early morning, in fact, when Gwyn had opened his heart to him (as he had never done to any human being), Tom had been

more tolerant of his chum's opinions—not that he shared them, but because he admitted to himself that Gwyn *had* a grievance against the sex, and, to a certain extent, had made out *his* case against it.

About a week after Kit Trevor's luncheon, on a certain fine day, everything seemed to be conspiring against the ease and peace of mind of Pennell Gwyn, and to be ruffling up his feathers the wrong way, without his having the consolation of unburthening his mind and having a good growl to his chum ; for Tom was fifteen miles away, playing the noble game of cricket, in the opening match of the season.

First of all, the morning's post, by an extraordinary coincidence, had brought him two long letters—one from his brother in the east, the other from Cyril Chester in the west.

The contents of both set him musing on those events which he had related to Tom, and he went on to parade in a gloomy discontented frame of mind.

Here he was nearly driven to madness by young Molter.

That romantic youth was in his troop, and

as he was giving him some injunctions, he suddenly detected something, by no means regulation, in his plume.

“What the deuce have you got there?” said Gwyn, scrutinising Mr. Molter’s head-gear rather narrowly.

Mr. Molter stammered unintelligibly, and blushed until his face could barely be distinguished from his facings.

“What is it?” persisted Gwyn.

“I—I—I promised to wear it, you know,” stuttered Molter; “it’s like what they—they used to do in the good olden times, don’t you know!”

“As I’m a sinner, it’s a lock of woman’s hair!” ejaculated Gwyn.

“Yes,” said Molter, seeking piteously to find reason in rhyme. “Don’t you recollect? ‘A golden tress of her hair I’ll twine in my—’”

“Get away, sir! and twine it in your horse’s tail! That’s where I’ll have it stuck if you ever come on parade again like that.”

“I—I didn’t think it could be seen, Gwyn—”

"Well, go off parade at once, and take it out then!"

"But I swore," pleaded young Molter.

"Go away, sir, and take it out, or you'll hear *me* swear—by Jove, you will?"

"What's the matter, Captain Gwyn?" called out Fane Vereker.

"Oh, oh—don't, don't!" said Molter. "*Please* don't, Gwyn—I'll take it out, I will—only don't!"

"Nothing, sir! only Mr. Molter wishes to fall out for a few moments," replied Gwyn.

"Certainly!" said Vereker, and the dejected Molter retired to transfer his *gage d'amour* to his pocket.

"Cursed folly! Upon my word it makes a fellow sick to see what asses men will make of themselves about women!" muttered Gwyn, as he sat in his room after parade, thinking of his romantic subaltern.

But his troubles for the day were only just beginning. There was a tramp and jingle of armed heels along the passage, followed by a knock at his door, and his Troop Sergeant-Major entered and saluted.

"What's it, Sergeant Crupper?"

"Beg pardon, sir. Five men here want to speak to you."

"What do they want, Sergeant Crupper?"

"Well, if you please, sir," said the Sergeant, a little nervously—he knew Gwyn—"if you please, sir, they want to get married."

"*Five* men want to get married!" said Gwyn, jumping up. "*Five* men in my troop? Let me at 'em! But no, I'll be calm. Bring them in, Sergeant Crupper, one at a time."

"Now, my good man," said Gwyn, as a good-looking, smart young private stepped into the room, and stood blushing and nervous as a girl, "You want to get married, eh?"

"Yes, sir," replied the young soldier, looking horribly ashamed of the fact.

"He's a very steady young soldier, isn't he, Sergeant Crupper?"

"Yes, sir."

"Doesn't get into scrapes?"

"No, sir."

"Doesn't drink?"

"Hasn't been 'up' since he 'listed, sir."

"Now," said Gwyn, "in consideration of your past good conduct"—the young man

looked pleased and hopeful—"and out of regard for your future welfare"—the young man looked still more pleased and hopeful—"I distinctly refuse to allow you to ruin yourself. No, sir! you're too promising for me to permit anything of the sort. Go away—That will do!"

"Please sir," said the man, "the young wo——"

"I don't care about the young woman, sir, any more than the young woman would care about you six months after you had married her."

"But, please, sir——"

"Right about face!" said the inexorable Sergeant, and away went number one, and number two entered.

"So you want to get married, too, do you, eh?"

"Yes, if you please, sir," said the man, in much the tone of voice of a little boy who says that he "didn't go for to do it," after he has thrown a stone through a window and been captured.

"Have you quite made up your mind on the subject?"

"Yes, sir," replied the man, gathering confidence. "Quite, sir."

"This is a very bad case, I'm afraid, Sergeant?" said Gwyn, shaking his head. "My good man, when did it come on?"

"What, sir?" asked the man, looking astonished.

"Why, the fit, the disease, the insanity, the wish to get married, whatever you like to call it?"

The man had no answer, although he gazed down at his boots, and up into the ceiling, and all round the walls for one, so he smiled a sad and twisted smile on his officer.

"You're quite decided to do it, if you get leave?"

"Yes, sir, quite."

"You've made up your mind?"

"Yes, sir."

"Here, Wilson!" said Gwyn to his servant, "get me a coil of rope."

A coil of rope was brought.

"Now, my good man," said Gwyn, slowly and impressively, "allow me to present you with this coil of rope, and if you find you can-

not conquer this weakness, attach one end of it to a beam or a branch, or anything convenient, but let it be in a secluded spot, where you will be safe from interruption. At the other end make a loop, into which insert your head, and then allow yourself to hang pendent, until the disease is cured. If you think you'll want any assistance in the operation, I shall order the next man for fatigue duty to afford you all in his power. There, that will do !"

"Shall I warn the next man for fatigue at once, sir?" asked the Sergeant, stolidly.

"No, wait until he applies for him," replied Gwyn.

"Right about face!" said Sergeant Crupper, and number two marched off sheepishly, holding the coil of rope, with a half-amused, half-angry expression of face."

"Now let's dispose of the third."

The third candidate now made his appearance.

"Now what do you want?"

"Leave to get married, sir, please."

"Do you think yourself a fit subject for matrimony?"

“Yes, sir,” said the young trooper, stoutly.

“Ah, I must just ask you a few questions first, with a view to ascertaining that for myself. How do you prefer your dinner—hot, as you get it now—or cold, or perhaps none at all?”

“Hot, sir, of course.”

“Supposing you were married now, would you be very much pleased and gratified at seeing that your wife preferred the society of almost any man to yours. Wouldn’t you like now, for instance, to see her flirting very much, *carrying on*, you know, as *you’d* call it?”

“No, sir, o’ course not,” said the trooper, instinctively clenching his fists, as if mentally remarking that he’d “like werry much to see the chap as ’ud try it on!”

“Hum! I’ve only one more question to ask you. Which are you, an angel or only an ordinary mortal?”

The young man hesitated.

“Come, come, sir! no prevarication. Which are you—an angel or an ordinary mortal?”

“Well! an or’nary mortle, I suppose, sir,” said the man reluctantly, and conscious that

he was damaging his case very much by the admission.

"I thought so. Then what the devil do you mean, sir, by coming here with your cock-and-a-bull story about being a fit subject for matrimony? and got the cool assurance to tell me that you like to have your dinner hot, and to keep your wife to yourself, and that you're not an angel! Get away, sir, and don't let me have any more of this nonsense. Now, Sergeant Crupper, have in number four."

Number four, a man with a sulky air, and a bad stamp of countenance, made his appearance.

"You wish to get married?"

"Yes, sir."

"I think, Sergeant Crupper, this is an incorrigibly bad character—in fact, the worst we've got in the troop?"

"Can't hardly do anything with him, sir. Here's his defaulter's sheet."

"Hum! Now, my man," said Gwyn, scanning the paper before him, "I see you've been tried by court-martial seven times. You've been flogged for disgraceful conduct. You've been in prison half your service.

You've been constantly up for insubordination and insolence to your superiors, and for fighting and quarrelling with your comrades. You've been tried for desertion, and marked with the letter D. In fact, you've committed nearly every crime a soldier can commit; and nearly every form of punishment has been inflicted upon you, but I'm happy to say that it's now in my power to award you—Here, Wilson! get me a black smoking cap you'll find hanging up near my bed.”

The cap was brought, and Gwyn put it on with due solemnity.

“As I said, it is now in my power to award you a punishment, worse than you've ever received from any court-martial. A punishment to which floggings, and your imprisonments, and your markings with the letter D will be mere child's play. A punishment which will be almost commensurate even with *your* crimes. Yes, sir! you SHALL get married! And see, Sergeant Crupper, that it's done as soon as possible!”

“Yes, sir. Right about face!”

“Hardened blackguard!” said Gwyn, taking off the black cap, “he richly deserves it!”


Confound it ! those infernal women are turning everything topsy-turvy in my troop ! There seems to be a regular epidemic running through it, from Molter downwards. I'll soon put a stop to it though ! Bring in number five, Sergeant Crupper !"

The sergeant looked into the passage and called to number five, but number five had fled wildly, long ago, and was now confiding in very forcible language to a comrade, that he'd sooner face ten thousand jilted maidens than the "cap'en" in his present mood.

"Now I'll go and have some lunch," said Gwyn, "and then, for a quiet ride in the country. Booh ! yah ! ugh ! pish ! Five men wishing to get married !"

CHAPTER III.

INFANDUM RENOVARE DOLOREM.

 WYN went for his quiet ride, but it did not tend to calm down his excited feelings. As he passed through the little country town of Hawley, he came across Fane and Blanche Vereker, wandering about the principal street, by way of a change from the usual drive or ride after lunch.

When he first caught sight of them they had just emerged from a shop, and Blanche Vereker, with merry ringing laughter, was stuffing the pockets of Fane's shooting coat with all sorts of knick-knacks, chocolate drops, sweetmeats, mechanical spinning tops, toys, &c., while Fane, with her parasol in one hand

and her bottle of smelling salts in the other, was taking in his "general cargo" with a good-natured, amused smile on his stern face. It was all right. If Blanche were pleased and happy with him alone, *he* was.

As he saw Gwyn, he waived the parasol cheerily, but Blanche abruptly stopped her laugh and her occupation, and bowed distantly.

"Yes, Fane Vereker!" soliloquized Gwyn, as he rode on. "That's more your style now, changed your sword into a parasol—yah!"

Later on, after mess, this inveterate woman-hater sat solitarily and moodily in his quarters, shirking companionship as he had done all through the day. He was drinking, perhaps, a little deeper than was his wont, and was smoking voluminously. Volume after volume rolled out of his mouth and curled away, but they did not seem to take with them the blue devils that were evidently haunting him.

"I wish Tom were here; I feel rather low to-night, and it's such a relief talking to him. His dear, honest old face, and his cheery voice are worth any amount of backy and

brandy, as soothers. No wonder women—pshaw!”—the remainder of the soliloquy ended in smoke.

“Aha, here you are at last!” said Gwyn, as Tom, in a suit of flannels and a straw hat, burst into the room, looking sun-burned and manly. “How late you are, old fellow! It’s past twelve. What have you been up to?”

“Such a lark, Pen!” answered Tom, throwing his bat and pads in one direction, his straw hat in another, and himself into an easy-chair. “There was a spread in the evening at the inn, a regular old-fashioned country cricket dinner, jolly old farmers, sanded floor, churchwardens and glasses round after dinner, and all that sort of thing. And they *would* insist on Aunt Sally and my stopping (he’d driven over with me in my cart just for something to do), and we had no end of speechifying about cricket—the usual thing—‘noble game,’—‘thoroughly English,’—‘bringing the peer and the peasant together,’ and all that. And, by Jove, Pen! I’ve mistaken my trade—I ought to have been something in the speaking line. They proposed the army, and I returned thanks. Such a speech,

Pen, my boy! *You* couldn't have given it better. I said: 'We are a nation of cricketers. Cricket is a national game. Our army is an army of cricketers'—[*Immense applause*]'—'and it has done more to gain a world-wide reputation to the noble game than any other body of men. They were scattered all over the globe, and wherever they pitched their tents, there they also pitched their stumps.' [*Frantic cheering.*] I'm afraid I began to get a little bit too ambitious here, for, encouraged by the tremendous applause, I went on: 'Yes, gentlemen, wherever there was a detachment of British soldiers, whether it was on the arid plains of Timbuctoo, or on Greenland's ice-bound coasts, even if it only consisted of a corporal and three men, they had their eleven.' "

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Gwyn, quite a different creature now to what he had been a quarter of an hour ago.

"Yes, I went a series of muckers there, but I pulled myself together wonderfully, and brought the house down with the next sentiment. 'Yes, gentlemen, the sun never goes down on the British empire, and the sun

never goes down on British cricket.' Applause that lasted for ten minutes, and gave me time to collect myself for my next effort. 'So long, gentlemen, as this cricketing spirit pervades the army, it will never be bowled out.' Renewed cheering, and an attempt, on the part of one individual, to give an *extempore* parody on 'Britons never shall be slaves.' But he was very properly silenced, and I went on: 'What did the Duke of Wellington say, on the eve of Waterloo, surrounded by his marshals and generals, all in full uniform?' You see I wanted to make it as impressive as possible. 'What did *he* say about cricket and the British army? He said: "Draw their stumps, and you draw their teeth!"' You might almost have heard the cheering here, I should think. The Duke of Wellington is always a safe draw at a country public dinner."

"Where the devil did you pick that last up?" asked Gwyn, laughing heartily.

"It was a brilliant thought of the moment, and it was such a success that I thought I'd tip them something else in the same style; so, as soon as the cheering was over, I said:

‘And what, gentlemen, did Napoleon the Great say about cricket? He had made himself well acquainted with all our institutions and our games; and what did *he, Napoleon*, say, as he stood on the highest pinnacle of the island of St. Helena, with his right hand in the breast of his surtout, surveying gloomily the dreary waste of waters below and all around him.’ I gave them a touch of pathos you see here. ‘He said then, gentlemen: “Ah! if I had only taught my brave soldiers the game of cricket, I should not now be playing this game of prisoner’s base here, all alone!”’ They cheered like mad at this; and one very old boy near me poked his churchwarden into his next-door neighbour’s waistcoat, and nodding his old head approvingly, said: ‘Ay, ay, I’ve heerd tell, when a bo-oy, how he said that, or summut like it.’ This nearly sent me into fits, and I could hardly come up to time when the cheering was over, but I gulped some sherry down, and finished up in a warning tone of voice: ‘Yes, gentlemen, let us take a lesson from this! Don’t let us wait, as *he* did, until too late, and then regret with useless repining, that we neglected

the education of our brave soldiers on this important point. This is not likely, however, ever to be our case; and when the enemy comes, gentlemen, we will apply the lesson taught us by our cricket. We will defend our hearths and homes as we would defend our wickets. Yes, when that time comes, let us take our guard carefully, without, though, any inclination to leg. Let us remove the individual from behind the bowler's arm. Let us pick up the blade of grass, or the diminutive pebble, between wickets, and cast it away. Let us, in short, take every precaution, and not throw away a single chance. Let us, then, survey the field calmly, but attentively, and then, gentlemen, let them *fire away, and do their worst!* Yes, gentlemen, as long as you trust to your army and encourage the noble game of cricket in it, you, in common with all Britons, never, never shall be slaves!!!”

“Ha, ha, ha!” roared both Tom and Gwyn together.

“This wind up was so appreciated that it received musical honours, and we all sang ‘Rule Britannia.’ This put the chairman in

mind of the navy, so he got up and proposed it; but there was no one to return thanks, until, at last, old Aunt Sally, who had just about as much sherry as he could conveniently carry, got up, and said that 'He hoped it would not be considered presumptuous on his part to rise to respond.' They cheered him loudly, so he went on and said, that 'he wasn't exactly in the navy himself, but that he had a brother who was a midshipman in it; and that there was, also, another link between himself and the navy, and that was his partiality to ships' tobacco.' There was great cheering at this, during which he hauled out that huge pouch of his, and passed it round the table, saying that 'nothing that *he* could say in praise of England's navy could impress them so much with a sense of admiration for it as a few whiffs of the baccy prepared by her bluejackets.' I felt fit to be tied to see old Aunt Sally watching with a grave face his fat old pouch going the round of the table, getting thinner and thinner. Then he told them, 'that although the navy had not much opportunity of practising their cricket, still their long stay at sea did **not** prevent them being

long-stops on shore whenever they got the chance.' Just as he had given this promise of bright things to follow, and we had cheered ourselves hoarse, he sat down most unexpectedly, and went off into a gentle doze."

Here this recollection was too much for Tom. He had been in a state of semi-suppressed laughter during the entire narration of the evening's exploits ; and his white teeth, looking whiter than ever, contrasted with his sun-burned face, had been flashing incessantly ; but now, at this point, he fairly gave way, and, leaning back in his chair, roared with laughter, and kicked his long legs up in the air.

" Well, Tom, old boy, and what did you do at the match ?" said Gwyn, as soon as Tom was a little more composed.

Tom made a round O with his finger and thumb, and winked his eye through it.

" Not your usual form, Tom. How was that ?"

" Leg before wicket," replied Tom.

" Oh ! then of *course* you weren't out—in your own opinion ?"

" Yes," said Tom, "*dead* out, I should think !"

"Oh, ingenuous youth! In the whole course of my cricketing experience I never yet came across the man who thought he was out 'leg before wicket.' Your honesty, Tom, is positively revolting, and, mark my words, will get you into some scrape some day!"

"Well, and what have *you* been doing all day, Pen, with yourself?"

"Oh! the usual grind in the morning, and in the afternoon I took a quiet ride, and, passing through Hawley, saw Vereker and his wife."

"Were they walking?"

"Well, they were going along pretty erect on two legs apiece, but I don't call it walking; it was the regular matrimonial crawl. I always pity a poor devil so when I see him crawling languidly along at that wearying married pace, and eyeing wistfully his former companions as they ride or walk past him. Vereker is sinking—lower and lower. He's now not much better than a panniered donkey—a panniered donkey, by Jove, sir; a sort of a fetch-and carry kind of arrangement."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, his pockets were sticking out on

each side, chock full of women's kickshaws, I suppose ; and he had his wife's parasol in one hand, and her smelling-salts in the other. Vereker used to have a good figure and a good tailor, but Nature and tailor might both keep their gifts to themselves, or bestow them upon some one else, if he's always going to turn his pockets into carpet-bags. Pshaw ! I used to respect Vereker. He was a first-rate commanding officer ; he was pluck to the back-bone ; and he paid women back in their own coin. Yes, he used to command respect at *one* time, but *now*—Pshaw ! and what for ! I don't believe that woman cares twopence about him, or ever did."

"Nonsense, Gwyn ! Blanche Arlington was far too good and sensible a girl for that. I knew her years before she was married, and I'm certain if she married Vereker without loving him, it was out of sheer innocence of what a woman owes to the man she makes her husband."

"Innocence ! my dear fellow ! why, they shed that with their first teeth."

"Well, I'll stand up for Blanche Vereker as if she were my sister," said Tom, "so

don't you go running her down, Pen, old boy."

Gwyn gave a series of expressive grunts.

"What's the matter, Pen? you seem down on your luck to-night."

This was the signal for Gwyn to launch out into one of his usual tirades against the sex, winding up with "Women's rights indeed! How about men's wrongs? How about the thousands and thousands of good honest fellows, driven to drink, to dishonesty, to suicide, by what their wives' infernal vanity, deceit, and love of admiration lead them into? Why if she *does* abstain from dishonouring a man's name, she probably nags him into a state of madness in which, the chances are, he does it himself by striking her, or something of the sort. Then what a howl of execration there is over the poor devil! Shut up, Tom! I *will* have my say. How about the homes made desolate, the lives blasted, the friendships turned into bitter enmity by these women?"

"How about the men who tempt them to all this?" said Tom, warmly.

"*Men tempt* them! Did you ever hear of

a lady called Eve, and a gentleman called Adam? That's an example they've never forgotten. Go and read your Bible, Tom, and don't talk to *me* about men being the tempters. Women's rights indeed! They're pampered and given into in every possible way by fools of men, and yet they go on whining about their rights, and clamouring for more liberty. Liberty! it's my firm opinion they've a great deal, too much liberty, and that they've been put on their trial, and have proved themselves not to be trusted with what they've got."

"By Jove, Gwyn! There's no end to your bitterness," said Tom, with heightened colour; "one would think, to hear you talk, that you came into the world different from any one else, and that you never had such a thing as a mother. Don't you ever think of *her*, Pen, when you go on cursing and jawing against women, and remember that *she* was one?"

Gwyn's face fell, and the tones of his voice seemed strange and altered, as he replied, "Yes, I do, Tom. Yes, I *do* think of her almost *all* the time I go on 'cursing and jawing against women' as you say. Look here,

Tom, do you recollect that morning after the ball, when I told you about my two brothers?"

"Yes; well, Pen."

"Well, you admitted that I had *some* reason for my bitterness against women, but I didn't tell you all. I've another score against them. I was nearly telling you then, but I couldn't, not even to *you*, Tom! But I will now."

Gwyn stopped, and poured out half a glass of brandy, and drank it off like a man steadying his nerves for some painful operation. His face was ashy pale, and his hand shook so that the glass rattled against his teeth, as he held it up to his mouth.

Tom looked at him in concern and astonishment, and laid his hand on his knee. "What's the use, Pen? It must be something painful and dreadful, and talking of those sort of things doesn't do any good. It only re-opens the wound."

"*Re-open*, Tom! No, my boy, *that* wound has never closed, and never will. It's been open and running for years, ever since I could understand what it all meant, and I *will* tell you now. And you'll never again accuse me

of unjust bitterness against women. It can be told in a few words. I'll just tell you the events of one evening of my childhood, and you'll understand the rest. On that evening I was playing in the nursery with my little brother Alan, who was then about three, I was about seven. It was just getting dark, when I heard my father's steps on the landing outside, on his way downstairs. I was rather a spoiled little fellow, and rushed out of the nursery, and threw my arm round his leg, and looked up into his face. It terrified me. It was as rigid and colourless as white marble. He didn't take the slightest notice of me, but, I recollect, he muttered, 'Oh, my God, it can't be!' and strode on. I lost my hold of his leg, and fell down a whole flight of stairs. Still, he never looked at me, but went on, never casting a glance to the right or left, and carrying a small mahogany case under his arm. I was picked up and carried back to the nursery, howling and bleeding, and to quiet me, I was taken to the window to look out, and I saw my father drive off in a carriage with four horses. I recollect I thought he must be uncommonly happy to be able to

drive off at such a pace ; but little Alan—I don't know what came over the child—seemed frightened, and said to the nurse who had been with us for years, 'Where's mamma ?' 'Hush !' said the old servant, beginning to sob bitterly. 'Oh, she's dead,' I said, 'or you wouldn't say hush !' In my innocence I conjured up the worst thing that I thought could happen to her ; I did not then know that there were worse things than death. Everything seemed queer that evening, the old nurse wouldn't tell us any stories, but sat rocking herself, and crying, and we could hear occasionally the men and the women servants on the stairs talking and tittering."

Gwyn's face here flushed crimson, and he paused for some time, and then continued—

"We never saw her again. She died about a year after, and—and—well, that case under my father's arm did the rest."

Gwyn paused again, and Tom said, "My poor old Pen, I do pity you."

"None of my brothers know it. The eldest one was away at school, and little Alan was too young to recollect anything about that night, but I did. It all sunk into my

mind, and when I was a boy at school, I began to draw conclusions from my recollections of that evening. And Tom, you can't think of the agony I suffered as the truth began to dawn upon me, or the tortures of doubt I endured for years. I went to Cambridge, but the older I got the more the thoughts preyed upon me, and I made up my mind to go into the army, and I left Cambridge. I had not been long in the service, when I was ordered out with a draught to join the head-quarters of the regiment in India, and I left Canterbury and went home for a fortnight's leave. I knew I might not see my governor again, so I determined to tell him my doubts, and to learn the whole truth from him before I left. Each day I intended to do it, but each day I put it off—I dreaded it so—until I left it to the last day, and when the last day came, I kept putting it off from moment to moment, until it was almost time to wish him good-bye—for ever as it turned out afterwards. Oh, Tom, old boy, you can have no idea of that scene! The dear old governor threw his arms round me, and with his white head buried on my

shoulder, sobbed out the tale of shame, and made me swear never to tell my brothers."


Gwyn's voice trembled so here, that it was some minutes before he went on. "And I had to leave him like *that*. It was the last time I ever saw him, but as I *then* saw him, I always now think of him, and always shall. And now, Tom" (Gwyn looked fixedly into Tom's face), "don't think that I'm ever likely to spare women for *her* sake. No, by heaven! if one word from me could take her out of that place where her sin has sent her, I, her own son, wouldn't—"

Tom placed his hand over Gwyn's mouth. It was like going between a lion and his wrath, but Gwyn stood it from *him*. "Hush! Don't, Pen! Don't, for God's sake! Your old governor never would have said *that*."

The scowl vanished from Gwyn's face, and the words no longer came hissing through his teeth, as he said softly, "God bless him! no, he lived to forgive, if he couldn't forget!"

CHAPTER IV.

EASTWARD HO !

E left Leonard Helstone to go to Kit Trevor's luncheon party, congratulating ourselves on having done with him for some little time ; but as the conclusion of the last chapter took rather a melancholy turn, we think, while we are in this strain, it is better to take our unhappy character in hand, and not allow him to fall too much into arrears.

So we bring him up to the front again, much the same as when we left him, or if there is any difference, he has perhaps fallen, if possible, a few degrees lower in the shade.

He was always inveighing against poverty, not because it pinched him, but because with

him it meant want of power to command respect, or even civility, and a curse inviting contumely and contempt.

He certainly had some foundation to build these ideas upon, but he allowed them to carry him away to an absurd extreme, and to take a firmer hold upon him daily.

Poverty! Poverty! rang in his ears always. He could never, like the northern farmer, have imagined his horse's footfalls giving out the cheery sounds, "Proputty, proputty, proputty." No; to Leonard Helstone they would have said "Povutty, povutty, povutty," instead.

Had it been within the bounds of possibility for him to have hired, for the afternoon, one of those golden-shod horses (late the property of a distinguished and luxurious gentleman of ancient days), and had he "titupped" him along the hard high road, we doubt whether even those costly shoes would have rung out anything so inspiring as "Proputty, proputty, proputty." No, to *him* they would merely have hammered out the same sad sounds as the ordinary iron ones.

He was always saying—sometimes with a

weary sigh, sometimes with a fierce energy, "I'd give *anything* to be rich!" or "I'd do *anything* for wealth!"

Now when a person is always saying that he would *give* anything, or *do* anything to attain a certain object, you may rest assured that, if its fulfilment rests entirely with him, it will never be reached. The anything he will *give* will never be his mind, his time, and his labour: the anything he will *do* will never be to work, day after day, patiently, steadfastly, and methodically.

No, the *anything* of these sort of people is uncommonly like *nothing*. What their *anything* means is this. If some one would show them a way of getting at once to their object, slap-dash; if it were to jump over a yawning abyss, climb up a steeple, or even to go to the other end of the world at a few hours' notice, they would try it. Anything involving only a sudden exertion of mind or body, when they might strain every nerve or run some sudden risk and then have done with it; or when they might see clearly what they were driving at, and know for certain that at the end of their journey the prize awaited

them without any more bother, they would doubtless do. But of any long-sustained effort, anything lengthy and irksome, with the prize uncertain and dim in the long vista of futurity, they would be utterly incapable.

In this particular way, Leonard Helstone would have been conspicuous, even amongst this flash-i'-the-pan sort of folk. He would have striven, and dared more. His flash would have been more brilliant, and also more evanescent. He would have sought his object at the cannon's mouth, but if it had been promised him on the condition of his going through the form of blowing his nose daily between the hours of twelve and one for six months, he would have gone off at first with a flourish of trumpets, and then broken down some day when he was in a despondent and dejected mood, and have said it was too much bother to go on with, and have given it up.

Unfortunately for this class, that *some one* doesn't often come and show them the short cut to their desire, so their exertions are confined, as a rule, to the mere statements of their readiness to give or to do. But Leonard

Helstone proved an exception. Some one *did* come and show him, if not a very short cut, still a tolerably defined and not very long road to the object of his desires.

This *some one* was a lawyer, whom Helstone happened to know slightly, and who called upon him one day at his rooms in Gray's Inn.

The visitor did not beat about the bush. He at once plunged into the object of his visit, and said, "I've come to talk to you, Helstone, on the subject of a queer discovery I have made, and which may turn out something greatly to your advantage. I am a good deal down at a place called Mynors Court ; you've doubtless heard of it if you've ever studied your family history ?"

Leonard Helstone nodded.

"It belongs now to a Mr. Molter, a man of enormous wealth, and whose affairs I manage. Mr. Molter is always buying up land in the county, and there is a great deal to be done ; and, as I said before, I'm a great deal down at Mynors Court. It used to belong, two or three generations back, to a Sir Hugh Carteret."

"A great grandfather of mine," said Helstone. "Well?"

"Exactly. Well, during some alterations, a number of family papers, and private documents, which belonged to him, were discovered, and from these I've gathered the following facts" (prompting himself from a paper in his hand): "Sir Hugh had three daughters, Harriet, Bertha, and Kate. I mention them in their order of birth. Harriet was the eldest, Kate the youngest. Now Sir Hugh, in addition to the Mynors Court property, became possessed of the adjoining Lissington estates, which he bought from a Tom Bullekeley, who was forced to sell them to liquidate debts contracted to an enormous extent by his reckless extravagance, which is remembered and talked of in the county to this day. Sir Hugh appears to have been a hard and unforgiving old man to his two elder daughters, in consequence of their marrying against his wishes. In fact, they both eloped; one, Harriet, the eldest, with a Henry Clennell, a Captain in the army, with whom she went abroad; Bertha, the second, with George Helstone, your grandfather.

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Sir Hugh never saw, or heard, of either of his daughters again. He disinherited and disclaimed them. His objection to Captain Clennell was his want of means, and he seems to have hated George Helstone on account of his fierce, ungovernable temper." How the curse seemed to stick!

"Well, I know nearly all about that," said Leonard, with a sneer.

"Wait a little!" said the lawyer. "I'm rather long in coming to the point, but I must take up link by link in its order. Sir Hugh, after the marriages of his two elder daughters, appears to have concentrated all his affection upon his youngest, Kate, who, from some of these papers, it would be seen, encouraged and fostered his dislike and bitterness to her sisters, to *their* ruin, and *her* advantage. Sir Hugh died, and Mynors Court went, with the title, to a distant relative, whose grandson sold it to my client, Mr. Molter, for the fancy price—however, that's neither here nor there; but the Lissington property he left absolutely to the youngest daughter, Kate, while the other

two were not even mentioned in the will. Perhaps you knew all that?"

"Yes," said Leonard, "and so would any one, if he had had a father who had been in the habit of dinning and damning the whole transaction, and old Sir Hugh, too, for hours together, into his ears."

"Well, perhaps we'll come to something presently that you *don't* know. Well, this Kate, oddly enough, soon after her father's death, married this same wild scamp of a Tom Bullekeley who had sold Lissington to her father, so the property came again into the Bullekeley family, with whom it had been for nearly two centuries *then*, and the present holder of it is a Captain Tom . Bullekeley, of the —th Lancers, grandson of the Tom Bullekeley who married Kate Carteret. Now, the will of Sir Hugh, bequeathing Lissington to Kate, is dated 7th March, 1796, and he died in 1798. But, amongst the documents I've discovered, there is another will, of the authenticity of which I have little or no doubt, dated the 8th February, 1798. Sir Hugh died on the 10th of that month. Perhaps you knew all

that?" said the lawyer, smiting the table a mighty blow with his roll of paper.

"No, I didn't," replied Leonard Helstone, while his sallow complexion became sallow, and he asked, with breathless interest, "and what is the purport of this other will?"

"Well," replied the lawyer, going on in his link by link style in the most provoking manner; "Sir Hugh seems not only to have repented of his behaviour to his two elder daughters, but his eyes seem to have been opened to the worldliness of his youngest, Kate, in keeping up his feelings of animosity against them, and he makes reparation on his death-bed, in what I've not any doubt was his last will, and bequeaths Lissington to the eldest daughter, Harriet, and her heirs; or, in case of her death, or in default of issue, then to the second, Bertha; then, under the same, and only *then*, to the youngest, Kate. Now, I haven't found out anything about the Clennell lot, or I haven't tried to, for Helstone is an uncommon name, and directly I came across this George Helstone it struck me you must belong to the same family, and without any difficulty I

traced the descent down to you, and determined to communicate my discovery first to you. If Harriet Clennell died without an heir, Lissington ought at this moment to belong to you. Why the last will never came to light, I can't make out ; but I've no doubt the youngest daughter, Kate, who appears to have been worldly and unprincipled, could tell us all about it, if the dead could speak."

"Why shouldn't she have *destroyed* it, then?" said Leonard Helstone.

"Well, I don't know," replied the lawyer. "There are shades of guilt, and a person—particularly a woman—might think less of *suppressing* than of *destroying* a document of the kind."

"What would you advise me to do?" asked Leonard.

"You're a lawyer yourself," was the reply. "Well, if no longer by profession, still, you are by education, and you ought to know. I felt my best course was to place you in possession of the facts. If you wish to consult with me any more on the subject, you know where to find me. I have an appointment

to keep at present. Good morning, Helstone ! By the way, all this has, of course, cost me time and trouble."

Leonard Helstone, when left alone, remained stunned by the news for a short time, but he was soon up and doing. The first thing to set about was to discover if any direct descendant of Harriet, the eldest daughter, lived ; and, to his chagrin, he found out the existence of our Purghatorree friend, Fred Clennell. His hopes, for the time, were dashed. The whole history was easily found out. Henry Clennell had gone to India with his bride, a Captain, poor and struggling ; he returned to England, a General, rich and distinguished. He left a son, Frederic, who, in his turn, left another—Lieutenant Frederic Carteret Clennell, of her Majesty's —th Regiment of Foot. Directly Leonard Helstone found this out, he was going to give the whole thing up ; but a fevered hankering to know more about this Lieutenant Clennell possessed him. The first thing to find was where his regiment was quartered. So he got an Army List one day, and it told him, " Purghatorree."

Purghatorree! He had never heard of the place. Somewhere in the East, was it? It sounded unhealthy. What, if young Clennell were to die, or to be shot? They were always fighting out there. He would like to see him; they might come to some agreement. He had always hated this "cursed country of fog and money-making." He had often thought of travelling abroad for years. Why shouldn't he now, and take Purghatorree in his travels? It didn't much matter to him where he went. That would do as well as any other place, and then he might see this Clennell. He might find him dying, or dead! His mind was made up—To Purghatorree he would go!

CHAPTER V.

TREMBLING IN THE BALANCE.



BACK again to Purghatorree, which is nearly two months older and sicklier than when the reader was last there!

In those two months, Purghatorree had made quite a sensation-bag ; so much so, that Purghatorree's doings were beginning to find their way into the papers at home ; and certain leading articles, sent forth by the press, were making a few Honourable and Right Honourable gentlemen a little uncomfortable, and unpleasantly expectant of nasty questions when the House should meet, replies to which they were already beginning to cook and varnish.

The military worms had turned at last ! They could not sharpen their swords, and attack their enemy, but they mended their pens, some of them, instead, and though they could not wield them as skilfully as their legitimate weapon, still it did not require any word-painting, or "Homeric fire," to enlist sympathy for glaring wrongs such as theirs, and to arouse indignation by the exposure of wholesale murder such as was going on amongst them. They told their unvarnished tale, and the press promulgated it to their countrymen.

Yes, in those two months Death had been holding high revel there. He had not confined himself to the usual "dance," but had broken out into a regular double shuffle down the middle and up again sort of a horn-pipe.

The place looked fever-stricken, uninviting, and parched up, as the Peninsula and Oriental steam ship "Candahar," with Leonard Helstone on board, dropped her anchor into the luke-warm water of Purghatorree harbour, at about eleven o'clock in the forenoon. Hardly had the fluke buried itself in the mud, when a

large shore-boat came alongside, and a military officer in *kalkee* uniform sprung on to the ladder, the instant it was let down, and rushed up with such precipitation, that he made his appearance on deck with his huge *solar topee* well shaken down over his eyes, in which state of temporary blindness he narrowly escaped tumbling down into the engine-room and dying a horrible death. Having been brought up violently by the "combings," he re-adjusted the *solar topee*, mopped his face with a very damp handkerchief, and asked for the purser of the ship.

A few weeks at sea awaken, even in the most *blasé* of bosoms, a relish for trifles, and a propensity for gazing and gaping at anything and everything, unsurpassed even in country cousins in London. But of all things to be gazed and wondered at, the one which excites most attention and scrutiny is the first arrival from shore on board a ship just entered port. Nothing comes up to him in point of interest, except, perhaps, a shark caught, or a man overboard at sea.

The officer in the *kalkee* uniform and *solar topee* was, according to the usual custom,

stared at as if he had just dropped down from the moon ; but, utterly regardless of all curiosity, he stamped up and down the deck, as if it were freezing instead of *frizzling*, and he were cold instead of perspiring at every pore, and mopping at every moment.

Leonard Helstone stared with the rest, but his interest increased as he detected the number of Clennell's regiment on the buttons of the officer's uniform. Perhaps it was Clennell himself ! At all events, he could tell him something about him ; so the next time the officer passed, he addressed him with—

“Excuse the liberty I take, but I see you belong to the —th. Is Lieutenant Clennell now with the regiment ?”

Before the last word was out of Leonard Helstone's mouth, the officer held up his hand, and said unceremoniously—

“Wait now for a moment, can't ye, till I tell ye ?”

Helstone's face flushed up, and the officer pulled a hideous but still apologetic face as he went on—

“Is it poor Fred Clennell you're asking for ?”

"*Poor* Fred Clennell!" The words and the tone raised a—well, if not a hope, a *thought* in Leonard Helstone's heart.

"Yes. I never knew him personally, but——"

"Shure that wouldn't make any difference! If you had been his own mother you wouldn't know him now."

"Why, is he ill?"

"Ill is it?" replied the officer, shaking his head. "Shure and he couldn't well be iller!"

With which apparent paradox, he trotted off, having caught sight of the purser, leaving Helstone not able to make out from his words and his manner and his shakes of the head, whether Clennell was only very ill or was dying, or even dead. In this state of uncertainty he could not help, moth-like, fluttering about the individual in whose breast lay the secret involving such mighty consequences to him, and he heard him introduce himself to the purser of the ship as "Doctor O'Toole of the —th."

"*Doctor!* . Humph!" muttered Helstone. "Well, if Clennell isn't dead, he must be

pretty near it, for *he* ought to know something about it."

"Is there a consignment of medical comforts and medicines for the Principal Military Purveyor of Purghatorree on board?" asked Dr. O'Toole of the purser.

"I believe there is," said the purser, "but I can tell at once by referring to my books. But, anyhow, they'll have to wait their turn to be sent ashore to the agents with anything else shipped for this place. We really can't undertake to hand over articles at once to any consignee who chooses to come on board almost before the ship has anchored."

"Look here, now," said Doctor O'Toole, "We've run short of 'medical comforts,' and we're running short of medicines. Quinine has been worth a guinea an ounce there on shore. Now many a poor fellow is lying there we might put on his pins again, and many a fellow, now on his pins, we might keep from lying there, if we could only get those 'comforts' and medicines at once. An hour or two may make a difference of life and death to some of them. Hang it, man alive! Look at it in a business way, if you won't

from a humane point of view. There's many a life, worth two hundred pounds sterling, may be saved by just a sup of those things you've got down there. Come, come," continued the Doctor, changing his tone to a wheedling one, "*you* won't mind a little extra trouble, and going out of your way a bit; and *they* won't" (pointing to some of the crew who were preparing to hoist some of the baggage from the hold), "for the sake of some of your countrymen in distress."

The Doctor succeeded, as determination, pluck, and good temp'r always will.

"Well, well, Doctor O'Toole," said the purser. "I'll ask the Captain, and *I* shan't throw any obstacles in the way; but in the meantime, come down to the saloon and have a glass of sherry or some pale ale."

"No, thank ye," replied O'Toole; "I'd sooner not now. Business first, pleasure afterwards. When I see those cases being hoisted up, I don't mind, but not till then."

Poor O'Toole was as dry as a bone—only inwardly, for outwardly he presented an appearance like a very porous filter—but he was steadfast in his resolve.

"By the way," said the purser, coming back, "the cases are consigned to the Military Purveyor. You're not, I think——?"

"No, I'm not," said Doctor O'Toole. "The Purveyor couldn't come himself—he's dead."

This last was thrown in as if it were rather an idle excuse, but still the only one to be given for the Purveyor's non-attendance.

"Well, I suppose we must do without him. You can give in the receipt for the articles, and that will do."

Doctor O'Toole gained his point, and, after having a glass of pale ale—nectar in that climate—he was watching the cases being placed in the large boat he had brought for their transport, when Leonard Helstone came up to him again.

"I beg your pardon. Did I understand you to say that Mr. Clennell was dead?"

"No," replied Doctor O'Toole. "He's not dead, but it's a toss up, poor Clennell, which way it will be;" and he indicated, with a motion of his hand the nicety to which the events of life and death were balanced in the scales.

"I am making a tour of the East," said Helstone, "and am going to stay here a short time." ("A mighty queer place for a tourist to stop at!" thought O'Toole.) "Can you tell me the best hotel to put up at?"

"Not many people go to hotels here, I think," said O'Toole, who, now that the "comforts" and the medicines were off his mind, was much more communicative. "But there's one, called the 'Victoria,' I should say was about the best."

"Thank you," said Helstone. "I shall do myself the honour of calling up at the barracks, and inquiring after Mr. Clennell, for although, as I said before, I'm not acquainted with him, still we're distantly connected."

"A connection of Clennell's, is it? Then, me dear fellow, don't go to an hotel at all. We can put you up in barracks—no, bedad, though! I wouldn't advise you to come to the barracks. You'll be down with fever in a few days. No, we'll be happy to see you any time you choose to come and lunch or dine, but it's poor hospitality asking you to come and catch the fever."

"Why, has there been much sickness?" asked Helstone.

"It's been awful! They've been dying like rotten sheep! They've two regiments here now, where there's only room for one."

"Mr. Clennell's case, then, is a very critical one, is it?" said Helstone, harking back to what was of more interest and moment to him, than the general health of Purghatorree.

"Yes. He ought to be at home now, picking up his health and strength, instead of lying at death's door. He was recommended to be sent home nearly two months ago by a medical board, and he was well enough to go then, but he got entangled somehow in the meshes of our military system, and he wasn't let go."

"I don't understand," said Helstone.

"Neither does any one else, me dear fellow. Ye'd be a wonder if you did. And he got a relapse, and he's been worse than ever, but, plase God, we may get him round yet!"

By this time, the cases that Dr. O'Toole was so solicitous about had been lowered into the boat, and he departed, soon followed by Leonard Helstone, bag and baggage.

All that night the latter lay awake in his room at the hotel. There were other sleep-dispelling influences at work besides the fearful heat, the mosquitoes, the strangeness of the place, and that feeling of being still rocked in the cradle of the deep that remains with one long after the ship in which this misery has been undergone has been left.

He could not drive away from his mind a hope which he knew was base and wicked, and for which he despised himself, for Leonard Helstone was neither quite a brute nor a scoundrel *yet*, but still which he could not repress, and that was, that the descendant of Harriet Carteret, the eldest daughter of Sir Hugh, might quietly slip out of this world, and make way for the great grandson of Bertha, the second daughter. He longed for the next day, to hear how the sick man was going on ; and when the next day came he hired a conveyance, and drove up the hills, and down again on the other side, into the natural furnace in which the barracks were built. As he left the hills and descended into the stifling atmosphere, he was nearly stopping the native Jehu, and asking him whether he was not

driving by mistake down into the crater of a very lively volcano.

He was, however, reassured when the driver pulled up in front of a fine stone gateway, where a pale and shaky sentry, looking like the ghost of a British soldier, directed him to Clennell's quarters.

This sentry stood at the gate feebly, or crawled about without a rifle, being too ill and weak to carry one. These sort of duties were called "light," and were furnished by the convalescents.

In answer to Helstone's knock at the door of Clennell's quarters, which was open, but had a screen of bamboo frame-work hanging before it, a little girl of about ten, decently dressed in mourning made of some light material, came to the screen on tiptoe, pursed up her colourless little lips, and held a thin forefinger up to them.

"What is it, please?" she said in a whisper. "He's just dropped off to sleep, and Doctor O'Toole said that if he did, he wasn't on no account to be woke up."

"Is this Mr. Clennell's quarters?" asked Helstone.

"Yes, sir," said the little girl.

"Well, I only want to ask——"

"If you please, sir," interrupted the cautious little nurse, "I'd better come out and talk to you in the passage," and she lifted the screen gently, and led the way down the passage for a little, and then stood up awaiting her questioner's will, a fragile, demure, pale-faced little thing, with red eyes and a pink tip to her nose.

"I only want to ask how Mr. Clennell is to-day," said Helstone.

"I think he must be better now, sir," said the little girl, "for Doctor O'Toole said if he had a good sleep it might be the saving of him, for he's been 'lerious for ever so long."

"Has he been very ill, then?"

"Oh, yes, sir; this last time he has. They thought he was gone lots of times."

Leonard Helstone was not particularly deficient in feeling, and he felt a glow of pity for the child, and a curiosity to know who she was, and what she was doing there.

"And what's your name?" he said.

"Jessie, sir."

"Jessie what?"

"Jessie Gibson, please, sir."

"And what are you doing here, Jessie? Where are your father and mother?"

The little girl's nostrils and mouth twitched, and the eyes and the tip of the nose got redder; and she produced, in choking silence from the depths of her pocket, a very soiled handkerchief—the receptacle of much snivelling—rolled up into a tight ball, which she proceeded to squeeze and roll up tighter in her hands, and then to dab her eyes savagely with. She then tried to answer the question, but with the first effort to speak a sob came bursting out from the sorrow-stricken little heart. Sorrowing, but unselfish in its grief, for she at once said, "Oh, come lower down the passage, please, sir! He may hear us, and wake."

Leonard Helstone was touched. Who would not have been? And, as the little girl stopped in the passage near the outer door, he laid his hand gently on the thin, little, black print-clad shoulders, and patted them. He did not repeat the question. He had had an answer more eloquent than words.

The little girl did not appear to think so,

however, so she made another effort, and said, "Please, sir, m-mo-mother's dead." (The *dead* came out in a piteous little wail.) "And so is poor, poor father. Oh! Oh!"

"Don't cry, Jessie! And who was your father?"

"Colour-Sergeant Gibson, sir, of K Company—boo hoo hoo—the best in the regiment, sir, and the same as Mr. Clennell's."

Yes, poor old Gibson had gone, too, and Jessie was "that ther little gurl" he had asked Clennell, and Clennell had promised, to befriend. Poor old Gibson! If the reader recollects he was to have been invalided by the next Board that sat; but they only sat periodically, and between the sitting of one and the assembling of the next, he had died, so between two Boards he had gone to the ground.

"And have you been ill, too, Jessie?"

"Yes, sir; I've had the fever, but I'm quite well now, thank you, sir. Oh! here's Doctor O'Toole coming now!" and the child's face brightened up.

"How d'ye do! Glad to see you've found your way down here," said Doctor O'Toole

to Helstone. "Ah, Jessie! and how's he getting on?"

"Oh, please, sir, he's sleeping beautiful!"

"Is he, bedad? Then there's nothing for me to do here, for sleep at this time is worth any amount of Doctors O'Toole. I'll drop in in the afternoon again, Jessie, and I'll send you over something nice from the mess. Come over there," he added, turning to Helstone, "the tiffin bugle will be going in a few minutes."

The invitation was accepted, and they both walked across the square—Helstone feeling more than ever that there *must* be a lively volcano in active operation somewhere very close—while Jessie returned to the darkened room to watch over the living, and mourn for the dead.

Doctor O'Toole did not always speak with a brogue. It was only in moments of excitement, or when he wished to be emphatic, that he did so, and at those times you might have cut it with a knife.

He was excited as he entered the ante-room with Helstone, whom he introduced to

a few officers who were lounging about waiting for the tiffin bugle to sound.

"Well, 'Docther,' and what's the news?"

He was "docther" to every one in the regiment, men and officers, Saxon, Hibernian, or Gael.

"News! Would ye believe it?" burst out O'Toole at once, after of course the usual preface: "Wait for a moment," &c. "We've had a letter from home pitching into us like haythens, for expinding so much port wine in the hospital, and telling us we'll have to bear the expinse ourselves, if such wanton waste is repated. Wanton waste! That's what they call saving a man's life worth two hundred pounds to them—and a great deal more to himself, faith!—for a palthry bottle of port wine. They've sent us *four dozen* in the last consignment, which will just last about a week at the most, for in the giniral hospital there's sixty, if there's one, just recovering, to whom a glass or two of port every day for a time means loife (he was getting very excited), and to kape it from him means murther. And when this is done—sure, and they spake of this same as if it were a very remote

occurrence—we're to go on an intirely new principle. We're to purchase the 'comforts' ourselves on the spot ; and, och, the generosity! Ye won't belave it! We may go as far, but we mayn't excade, two shillings a bottle for the port!"*

At this there was a general howl of execration ; and the senior officer present, a fat old Major, seemed to sicken and turn faint in his chair, as he faltered out, " Come, come, O'Toole ; you're joking !"

" By me sowl, it's God's tr-r-uth ! Two shillings a bottle !"

" Don't, don't, O'Toole !" said the fat old Major, whose nose seemed to be hung out like an illuminated sign-board, to show that " liquors were drunk on the premises." " Don't ; it's positively revolting !"

" Two shillings a bottle !" repeated O'Toole, regardless of the old Major's entreaties. " Why, it's enough to knock a sthrong man down, let alone a poor fellow thrimbling in the balance ! What would *you* take, Major, to dhrink half a bottle of two shilling port at this moment ?"

* Fact.

The Major shuddered, and even the nose paled as if the light in the illuminated sign-board had suddenly gone out, as he said rather angrily, "Come, come, O'Toole; a joke's a joke, but you're carrying it too far! Ugh!"

"Well, I'll tell you what it is. Oim not going to commit wholesale murther for *any* Government; and my name's not O'Toole if I give a poor fellow any of that same two shilling port, barring, perhaps, a man I catch shamming, and I'll give it him as a punishment. But if, in my opinion, it's necessary for a sick man to have port, I'll not give him poison, but I'll send over to this mess here, and get it good, and maybe save his life by it; and if the Government won't pay for it, which I don't suppose they will, why, although I'm a poor man, and an humble individual——"

"No, no," cried a voice; "a descendant of Brian Boroo, king of Ulster, indigent, perhaps, but *never* humble!"

Doctor O'Toole stood chaff quite as well as he administered it, and he replied without being in the least put out, "Anyways, *he* wouldn't have thrated his army like that. He

would have provided for them dacently, maybe it *might* have been with a rap on the head with his ould shillelagh ! but he wouldn't have sent them out of the world with a mixture of blacking and logwood ! No, I'm a poor man, but if Government won't pay for it, *I* will. By the Holy Nailers I will ! There !"

Now, when Doctor O'Toole got to the "Holy Nailers !"—the exact meaning or origin of which had not as yet been fathomed by his friends—it was a signal that his indignation and his oratory had reached their highest pitch ; and it was generally the wind-up to both, as it was in this case.

Bravo O'Toole ! Purghatorree had in vain done its worst against him. It had sometimes given him a knock-down blow, and laid him on his back with fever for an hour or two, but the next day the plucky little doctor had bounded up again with the elasticity of an indiarubber ball, and was hard at his noble work once more, cheering drooping spirits, and alleviating pain and sickness wherever he

• getting to the bottom of his
and had tried hard, and could

not do it. If most of Ireland's sons could, and would, like O'Toole, only utilise their pluck, what numbers of sleepless nights they might have saved many a minister of the Crown !

Helstone was taken in to "tiffin," and treated with the usual hospitality by the few officers who happened to be off the sick list at the time.

As to Doctor O'Toole, he just snatched a few hurried mouthfuls, and was away again on his errands of mercy. But although his duties called him into the very midst of misery and wretchedness, he seemed never to forget an individual case of hardship or sorrow, when a chance turned up for lightening it of some of its burden. He stopped suddenly on his way to the door, and addressed a young officer with "Are you going out in your buggy this evening, Charters ?"

"Yes," was the reply, "I look upon my buggy as a 'trap' to catch the only air this poor child ever gets now. But, 'Docther,'" added the good-natured young subaltern, as he suddenly recollected how hard-worked O'Toole was, and that he did not keep a buggy, "you can have it this evening, I'm

sure, and welcome. I'll go and sit with Clennell instead."

"No, no, thanks, Charters, me fine fellow ; but there's that little Jessie Gibson, poor old Gibson's little girl, she's still wake after the faver, and she's been sitting in Clennell's room there, as good as gold every day ever since he's been so bad. If ye'd take *her* out, me boy, for a dhrive——"

"Of course I will, poor little soul ! What a good old fellow you are, ' Docther,' to think of it," and the young man thought to himself, "and what a selfish brute *I* am—it would never have entered *my* head. There's just room for a child in the buggy besides myself, and there's lots of 'em too ill and spiritless to play about. By Jove ! I'll take one out every night."

Leonard Helstone made himself so unusually agreeable, that he was asked to the barracks the next day to dine, and he went away after lunch feeling more peace and goodwill towards man than he had perhaps ever felt before.

In the meantime, Clennell slept on peacefully for hours, and during those hours of quiet, kind Dame Nature was working hard

to get that deranged brain and those shattered nerves into proper trim again. Out of the one she was brushing and scaring away crowds of little hobgoblins, and hideous phantoms, who had been having quite a gay time of it up there. The other, she was soothing and smoothing with her soft voice and gentle hands.

She had just chased away the last little imp, and breathed softly on the wasted limbs, when Clennell awoke, feeling as if he had shaken off some other existence that had not belonged to him, and had returned to his old self again.

His first words were, "Where's Jessie?"

"Here, please, sir."

"Well, Jessie, I've had a good sleep, eh?"

"Yes, sir, for ever so long, and Doctor O'Toole says, sir, you'll get on now first-rate."

"Yes, I do feel much better, and have you been here all day?"

"Yes, sir, Doctor O'Toole sent me over some dinner from the officers' mess."

"And what have you been doing with yourself?"

"I've been looking over the pictures, and reading some of the story books you sent me when *I* had the fever, sir. I couldn't half read them *then* : and then there's been some of the officers to inquire after you. Oh ! and there's been a strange gentleman to ask after you, sir !"

"A strange gentleman, Jessie ? I wonder who he was. It may be some fellow I happen to know in the regiment that has come here since I've been down. Was he an officer, Jessie ?"

"Oh, no, sir ! I don't think so ; he wasn't straight enough."

"Well, never mind. Run away, Jessie, and see if you can't find some one to play with, now that it's getting a little cool."

"Please, sir," said the child, with a brighter look than the wan little face had worn for many a day, "Doctor O'Toole, when he came here this afternoon, said I was to go out for a drive with Mr. Charters, but I wouldn't go away, sir, until you awoke."

"With Charters, eh ? Good fellow, Charters ! Well, Jessie, be off with you, and tell Mrs. Moroney to smarten you up a bit."

"Good-night, sir!"

"Good-night, Jessie!"

"My!" said Mrs. Corporal Moroney. "Go-in' out drivin' with a officer, and such a smart young spark, too, as Mr. Charters! Why, you'll be gettin' quite proud and stuck-up like, Jessie. You won't be forgettin' old friends, will you, Jessie?" continued Mrs. Moroney, who, worthy old soul, was always striving with elephantine banter to bring a gleam of pleasure into the sad little face.

The child laughed, but the laugh gradually died away until it ended in a whimper. Mrs. Moroney, while she had been speaking in this playful style, had been busying herself tidying the child "up a bit," that's to say, she had given her face a wipe with a damp towel, the skirt of the black print dress a tug down, and the body a hitch up; and these little offices had raised the recollection of how other hands had been wont to perform them, but oh! so differently! not that Mrs. Moroney was anything but kind, but what can come up to a mother's care and solicitude as she sends her child forth amongst strangers?

Jessie went out for her drive, and young Charters told her stories, and raised many a laugh, and drove close to the sea, so that she might get the benefit of its breeze, and told her all about ships until the redness left the eyes and the tip of the nose, and begun to settle in the cheeks instead. And when she came home, she felt just like a little girl in a fairy story, and oh! so grateful to Charters, as she returned his bright nod and cheery "Good-night, little 'un!" with a curtsy, and "Good-night, and thank you, oh so much, sir!"

"Little creature looks a hundred per cent. better already," remarked Charters to himself. "By Jove! I'll take her out every evening, or some other little 'un. There are lots of 'em weak and helpless."

Charters kept his resolution for about ten days, but at the end of that time he became weak and helpless himself, and not more than a week after *that* again, the buggy held in the evenings, not the brave generous English boy, and a sickly little invalid by his side, but a fat brown Parsee who chuckled to a friend that he had got the whole "turn out" for a

mere song at a sale of the effects of a young ensign who had died at the barracks.

"Oh dear! I feel uncommonly weak," thought Clennell, as Jessie left the room, "but it's a jolly kind of a weakness after all," and then he dropped off into a doze, waking up gently every now and then, just enough to feel delightfully conscious of being free from pain, and then dropping off again, gaining new strength with each little nap.

As he opened his eyes after one of them, they fell upon O'Toole, who was standing watching him.

"Well, Clennell, and how's yerself? I want just to hear how you are after your sleep, before I go to mess."

"I'll tell you, O'Toole, old fellow; I feel as if some one had kindly opened the top of my head, and let all the heat and steam out, and as if the individual who has been amusing himself for the last three weeks in pouring molten lead through my veins, and racking my joints, had considerably left off, and—"

"Well, you'll do first-rate now. But don't go talking too much. You must keep quiet.

Rest for mind and body is the only thing now."

"When does the mail go out?"

"Tut, tut, nonsense! you mustn't go bothering your head about that yet. We'll ship you off as soon as you've got the strength to put one foot before the other."

"I wasn't thinking of myself. I was thinking of Sergeant Gibson's little girl. I want to get her home as soon as possible out of this place. I promised him when I was ill the first time when he came to see me here, and I promised him again when I returned the visit and he was on his death-bed, that I'd befriend his little girl, and I want to get her home now as soon as possible. I shall worry myself until I know she's on her way to England."

"Well, the mail goes out to-morrow," replied O'Toole, who had in vain tried to stop Clennell; "shure she can't go then, but there's a batch of invalids going home in a hired transport the day after. Hunter's going in charge, and he'd take care of her."

"Yes, that will do. Will you write a letter for me now?"

"Me dear fellow, for goodness sake give your mind a little rest! You'll be bringing the faver back again!"

"*Do* write it for me, O'Toole. I'll be quiet and easy after it."

Doctor O'Toole saw it would be much better to get it off his mind, so he set to work and wrote a short letter from Clennell's dictation.

"And hwat's the address?"

"Mrs. Chichester, Lissington Towers, Hillandaleshire, England," replied Clennell.

"There," said O'Toole, sealing it up and putting it into his pocket, "I'll post it for you, and it will be off the first thing to-morrow. Good-night!"

"Thank you. Good-night, O'Toole. I feel quite easy now."

The next morning after Clennell had listened to Jessie's rapturous description of her drive, he said, "Jessie, would you like to go home to England?"

"Oh, no, no, sir!" said the child, passionately. Her home was the regiment; although neither father nor mother were any longer in it. She knew no other. Besides, the young affections

had already begun to cling round Clennell, and O'Toole, and Mrs. Corporal Moroney.

"Fancy, Jessie, though, how much nicer it would be in England, where there are green fields, and waving trees, and brooks, and where you could go out and play in the day-time, instead of sitting indoors here afraid to stir out for the sun."

"Oh, please, sir! I'd much, oh! much sooner be here with you, and Doctor O'Toole, and Mrs. Moroney. Oh! don't—don't *please* send me away, sir!" And the child cried bitterly.

"But you would have kind friends, Jessie. I've written to two ladies who'd be so kind and good to you, and whom you'd soon love so much. Would you like to see a picture of one of them?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, get me that case."

Jessie brought a small photographic case from the table.

"There, Jessie!"

The child gazed for a long time. "And is this the lady I should go to, sir, if you was to send me away?"

“That’s one of them. Don’t you think her pretty?”

“Oh, yes, sir!”

“Well, she’s as good and as kind as she’s pretty, I’m sure. Would you mind so much if you knew you were always to be with that lady?”

“No, not *so* much *now*, sir.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE BAD ANGEL.

DAY succeeded day at Purghatorree in the same weary, monotonous groove of heat and sickness, but still Leonard Helstone lingered in the fever-stricken place as if it had been a very paradise on earth.

The officers whose acquaintance he had made could not understand what possible attraction the spot could offer to a tourist ; and that a person who had it in his power to leave should stay an hour in the detested hole was indeed inexplicable. The matter, however, only strengthened them in the opinion that they had already formed of him, that he was "a queer, unaccountable sort of a beggar ;"

and they continued their hospitable attentions to him, partly on account of his connection with one of their number, and partly on account of the rarity of such visits.

A week elapsed before he met Clennell, and the sight of the death-like countenance and wasted form, raised that wicked hope—do all he could to keep it down—higher than ever in Helstone's breast. He determined, under existing circumstances, not to disclose the discovery which affected Clennell so closely, but to bide his time. If Clennell died, well and good ; if he regained his health and strength, it would be time enough *then*. In either case, he made up his mind to remain with him until fate had decided it one way or the other ; and as the invalid was going home by the next mail, he determined to accompany him.

He did his best in this short time to ingratiate himself with Clennell, and as the latter was a generous warm-hearted sort of youngster, more inclined to like than dislike his fellow-creatures, the task, even to a sour, ill-tempered individual like Helstone, was not a difficult one. It was with unfeigned pleasure,

then, that Clennell heard him announce his intention of 'going home in the same steamer.

"Yes, I have just had news from home by this letter" (holding out a shoemaker's bill for a small amount, which had been forwarded on to him), "which makes it imperatively necessary for me to return at once. It's provoking, as I had intended doing the far east thoroughly before I returned. However, there's one set-off to the annoyance, and that is, I shall be able to accompany you, and I shall be happy to do anything I can for you on the voyage. I may be useful in many little ways, until you pick up your strength again."

"Well, I'm sorry for your sake, as it's spoilt your trip, but I'm glad for mine, for when a fellow is utterly knocked into a cocked hat as I am, it makes a great difference, and is a great deal more pleasant, knowing some one on board just at first; for I'm as weak as a kitten, and I shan't be better until I get a few hundred miles away from this cursed place."

How the days did drag, or seemed to, to Clennell! Every minute was counted. No

wretched little cuffed and caned dunce of a schoolboy ever longed for the holidays, no slave ever pined for emancipation, as *he* did for that day on which he was to shake the dust of Purghatorree off his feet. Sometimes his heart leaped for joy when he thought that he was really going to see the dear old white cliffs again so soon; and sometimes, when the fever was still hanging about him, he despaired of even living to see the happy day when he should start for old England.

But the day *did* arrive, and Clennell sat in an easy cane chair on the poop of the steamer, early in the morning, with Helstone, O'Toole, and two or three brother officers who had come to see him off, standing round him and chatting. How most of them, poor fellows, envied Clennell from the bottom of their hearts! He certainly would not have looked an object of envy to most people, as he sat in his chair, pale and prostrate, and in a state of utter collapse. But he was *homeward bound!*—words of thrilling import to poor exiles.

“Now then! who’s for shore?” sung out a rough and rasping voice, as if it had struggled through a windpipe into which a few

nails and a file or two had got by accident, "Who's for shore?"

Horrid words those! Harsh signal that the agonising and dreaded moment has come, when *good-bye* must be said, and the last final wrench of separation be given, amidst the escape of steam and tears, and the ringing of bells, and the wringing of hands and hearts.

"Good bye, Clen!" "God bless you!" "Good-bye—keep up your pecker, old boy!" resounded on all sides.

"Good-bye, O'Toole! I never shall forget your kindness as long as I live. God bless you for it, dear old 'Docther,'" said Clennell, as he wrung O'Toole's hand.

The paddles went round, and Clennell, with the assistance of Helstone's arm, crawled to the bulwarks and looked over the side with dimmed eyes at the regimental boat dancing on the gleaming waves astern. For a long time he watched it bathed in the early morning sun, which was peeping quite timidly over the hills, that so jealously guarded the barracks from the breath of heaven, as if it were as harmless as it was beautiful, instead of being the fierce monster

he would prove himself in a few short hours, striking men down dead, and breeding fever and pestilence with his fiery breath.

“What a rum thing human feelings are!” said Clennell. “Here have I been fretting and longing for this moment for months, and, now that it has come, I feel as if I should like to be going back with them in that boat to the wretched old place. I’ll never see some of them again. There’s Frank Charters standing up in the bow, waving his handkerchief on the boat-hook! Good-bye, Frank, old boy! I wish to Heaven, Helstone, the dear old corps were all on board this ship, instead of being left there to rot!”

Leonard Helstone and Clennell shared the same cabin, and the former used to lie awake at nights, watching his companion sleeping—the invalid was allowed a light in his cabin on the Doctor’s certificate—and thinking how strange it was that they should both be brought so closely together.

At these times his evil genius and his good angel used to fight and struggle within him for the mastery. Sometimes the latter prevailed, but, alas! more often the former drove

his adversary off the field, and held it, and then a host of bad thoughts took possession of his heart and brain; and he would think, as he looked at the bloodless lips and cheeks, how hard it would be if Death, who seemed to be giving him a helping hand, and to have already laid it on his victim, should, after all, withdraw at the last moment. Then he would think that, when a life like that hung by so slender and rotten a thread, there might be many indirect and easy ways of making the thread still more rotten, until nothing could save it from snapping.

Anything like violence? No! He recoiled shudderingly from that. No, that would be downright murder. But gentle means might be employed. For instance, if he were to open that port, and the cabin door, and allow the draught to play on that sleeping form as it lay bathed in the sweat of weakness—there could not be much harm in *that*. Fool that he had been! Why, the very night before, Clennell had gone to sleep on deck in one of his fits of exhaustion, and there, thinly clad, he might have slept for hours, his body drinking in disease at every

pore with the deadly dew, if *he*, blockhead, dolt! had not awakened him, and helped him down to his cabin.

Yes, means such as these at times flashed through Leonard Helstone's brain, and had he used them with success he would, doubtless, have laid the flattering unction to his soul that he had not committed murder. Murder, though, it would have been, in the sight of Heaven, as foul and as wicked as if he had stabbed his victim to the heart with a dagger, or blown his brains out with a pistol!

Then, again, when the good angel prevailed, away went these black thoughts, like bats and foul things before the light of heaven, and a flood of soft, gentle feelings took their place, driving away for the time, ambition from his heart, and scheming from his brain; and there arose, instead, pity and compassion for the poor sufferer, breathing hard and painfully, as if he were struggling with the Destroying Angel for each breath. And then he would get up, and tenderly move the head into a more comfortable position, and replace, lightly, the clothes that

had been thrown off in that restless, fevered sleep.

But, as we have said before, the good angel decidedly had the worst of it in his contests with the bad one ; and when he *did* gain a victory he was probably so surprised that he was unable to make the most of it, and follow it up as he should have done. There was no giving in altogether about him, though. He was driven off the field often, but he was always on the look-out for a soft moment, when to renew his exertions. At first, he had called in an ally in the shape of Conscience, but on the other hand, his enemy brought Ambition up to the front, and poor little Conscience got choked off at a very early stage of the proceedings by this unscrupulous giant.

In happy ignorance of this one-sided contest, Clennell went on from day to day, heartily grateful to Helstone for the numerous little services he was able to render, and picking up, little by little, a few fragments of his shattered constitution. But after leaving Aden, the fearful heat of the Red Sea threw him all back, and was nearly trans-

ferring him, as a passenger, from the P. and O. boat to Charon's ferry.

Even the strongest men were prostrated then, and one afternoon, when they were steaming *with* the breeze, and going along at about the same rate with it, the heat was so stifling and suffocating, that it was beyond human endurance. Passengers and crew gasped like fishes out of water, and the engineer officer on duty came up and reported that two native stokers had fainted down in the stoke-hole, and that it was impossible to stay in the engine-room any longer. When to this was added the report of the ship's Surgeon that two of the passengers were dying—Clennell was one—and that he could not answer for their lives four hours longer if the fearful heat continued, the order, "'Bout ship!" was given, and the vessel was kept steaming slowly, head to wind, for six hours, and then resumed her course in the night.

A few more days like this one, and Clennell would have lain peacefully at the bottom, his bones mingling with those of Pharaoh's warriors, and his head, perhaps, pillowed on one of their charriot-wheels. But when things get

to their worst they then begin to mend. That day was the most trying, and after it they proceeded to Suez in comparative comfort.

At Alexandria, however, he was too ill to go on, and rooms were taken for him at the hotel.

"I feel I can't leave you like this, Clennell," said Helstone, as he sat in the sick man's room, soon after he had been conveyed there from the boat. "I can't leave you ill and amongst strangers. I'll stay with you."

"Never mind me," returned Clennell feebly. "I'm beginning to lose heart after all these relapses. I don't much care what becomes of me now. In my recovery, I'm something like that wretched old snail in algebra, who was always climbing two feet up a pole and then slipping down three. No, don't stay on my account, Helstone. You've something important that calls you home."

"My mind's made up, and, what's more, *has* been made up, and I've ordered my luggage to be brought ashore, so there's no use saying anything more about it," said Helstone.

"My dear Helstone, this is kind, and it's a

kindness I could not have expected from almost a total stranger."

"You forget, though," said Helstone, "that, although we are, as you say, nearly total strangers, still we have a few drops of blood in common, and blood is stronger than water."

"Ah, yes, true," replied Clennell. "I always forget that relationship. The truth is, I knew so little good had come to my family from the Carterets, and so little was ever likely to come, that I had almost forgotten my descent from them, until you reminded me of it."

"There now, don't let us talk any more. You must be tired after your move in the heat of the sun, and I'll leave you to rest and quiet, and you may be certain, Clennell, I'll stick to you until you get better," said Helstone.

Clennell could only murmur, "You're a trump, Helstone," and think how human nature was maligned. Why here was a fellow whose motives could not but be disinterested, sticking to him in his troubles and distress like a brother!

To do Leonard Helstone justice, his good angel had *something* to do with his decision to

stay with the invalid ; but it was nearly the last expiring effort. After that, he fought hopelessly, and was soon overpowered whenever he came into the field.

At Alexandria Leonard Helstone formed a plan, to be carried out if Clennell lived. And whom does the reader think he fixed upon, as his aider and abettor in his designs ? Why, the old companion and friend of his dreary youth, Pomp the dragoman.

One day, when Clennell was so far recovered as to be thinking of proceeding on his journey, Helstone, with his scheme in view, said to him—

“ What do you think, Clennell, if instead of going home by the hackneyed old way of Malta and Gibraltar, or Marseilles, we were to take the steamer to Corfu, and then go on either to Brindisi and through Italy, or to Trieste and through Vienna ? There would be lots of change of scenery for you, and it would be charming, compared with the monotony of the other route. What do you say ? ”

Clennell readily assented, and as soon as he had sufficiently recruited his strength they took a steamer to Corfu.

As they neared the island, Helstone suggested that they should break the journey, and make a short stay there.

"It's no use, Clennel," he said, "now that you're beginning to pick up so well, running the chance of being thrown all back again, by knocking yourself up with travelling. A week or so's rest will do you all the good in the world."

Clennell was undecided. He pined for old England, its friends and its comforts, its sports and its *roast beef!* and he wished to get there as soon as possible. But the sight of the dark olive groves, as the vessel steamed close along the coast of the lovely island, dispelled for the time those sweet visions of hunting and roast beef, and made him long to throw his sun-dried and fever-parched body under their deliciously cool shades.

Everything that met his gaze, as he looked on that fair land—leafy glades of myrtle and orange, grape vines loaded with luscious fruit, running streams, and peaceful-looking cottages, all seemed to invite the weary wayfarer to come and rest, and he felt that there was as much chance of his refusing the invitation

as there would be of a traveller in the desert, choked with the sand, declining a proffered cup of cold water.

They were such places as he had wandered through in his delirium, when it had, now and then, chosen to visit him in a pleasant form. But *now* it was joyous reality, and there would be no bitter awakening to pain and fever, just as he was going to throw himself on a mossy bank, or take a plunge into the cool depths of some clear pool. The soft landscape, as it were, beckoned to him, and in his "very face did smile;" and there was no resisting it. Its beauties became more and more fascinating and alluring, as they were thrown out against that dark background—the recollection of Purghatorree.

"I wouldn't miss staying here for a few days for anything, now that I have seen the place," said Clennell; "and if the suggestion hadn't already come from you, I should have made it myself."

So they stayed in the lovely island, and the first step in Leonard Helstone's plan was made.

For the first two days he accompanied

Clennell in his drives into the country, but time was becoming an object, and he could not afford to waste any more of it, so, on the morning of the third day, he entered the invalid's room on business bent, just as that individual was dressing, in the delightful anticipation of a day to be spent in shady retreats, and in the health-restoring fresh air.

"Well, Helstone! are you coming out with me again to-day? I'm thinking of driving to the Pass of Pantaleone, one of the loveliest parts of the island they tell me, this morning, and if you'll come, we can take our grub, and have a little sort of a picnic. By Jingo! if I go on at this rate I'll run you a race round the island in a week, Helstone. 'Wait for the turn of the—' Woh! Hold up, you miserable devil!" This last was addressed to his right leg, which, when its left companion had been taken off the ground for the performance of a pirouette in time to the song, had doubled up as if it had been all hinges.

"No, I can't go with you to-day, Clennell. I am going over to the mainland for three days or so. I hope you won't think it selfish

of me to leave you, after inducing you to stop here ; but——”

“Selfish, my dear fellow ! Of course not ; I enjoy your society when you *do* come with me ; but, to tell you the truth, after what I’ve been accustomed to for a couple of years, I’m in such an innocent and pastoral frame of mind, that the trees, and the grass, and the flowers are at present the most delightful companions I can have.”

“I am going over to Albania, and wish you could accompany me.”

“I’ve a great mind to, ’pon my word !” said Clennell. “I feel up to it, I think.”

“No, no ! I wouldn’t have you on any account. I should never forgive myself,” said Helstone, “if you brought on that fever again, for there’s a lot of malaria over there at night-time. No, you stop here, and amuse yourself quietly.”

“What a kind-hearted considerate beggar it is,” thought Clennell. “And what are *you* going to do over there ?” he asked.

“Well, my father was Consul for a long time there, and I should like to have a look at the old place again. That’s all.”

They shook hands, and both went their ways; Clennell, to enjoy and admire the works of the great Creator, and with a new feeling of thankfulness in his heart, which was lifting his soul higher heavenwards than it had ever soared before in his thoughtless, giddy young life; and Helstone, with thoughts black as night and a plot in his heart which were dragging him down in the opposite direction.

The home of his youth had not advanced a step with the times, and had not expanded since his younger days into a place of sufficient importance for steamers to stop at; so he chartered for a few days a dilapidated, crazy cutter yacht, which had been a tight enough little craft in those palmy days when the British garrison was at Corfu, and with a crew of two men and a boy he set sail for the wretched spot.

The wind was fair, and in less than a day he reached his destination.

The place had not changed at all. There was the same flagstaff, a little bent by age and the prevailing wind, perhaps, but still evidently the same, for there were the initials

"L. C. H." he had cut on it nearly eighteen years ago, and for which he had been thrashed within an ace of his life. There was the same rickety tumble-down house, from which letters were proudly headed "H. B. M. Consulate;" and there was her Britannic Majesty's Consul himself, looking aghast and scared at the sight of a stranger, and with an oak-leaf pattern gold band round his cap, which might have been, from its aged look, the very identical one that his (Leonard's) father had worn.

Yes, there was Circumstance! There was Position! But where was Pomp? That was the question.

His object was to find him out as soon as possible, but he could not resist first calling on the Consul, for the sake of seeing the old rooms again.

Her Majesty's representative had at first been lost in amazement at the unwonted spectacle Leonard presented in the apparel of an English gentleman. No such person ever came there except to be the Consul. The last similar arrival had been himself; and the one before that, again, had been his

predecessor in office ; and he had, therefore, at once concluded that the home Government, with a suicidal disregard to the interests of the nation, and by an arbitrary and despotic act, had superseded him without warning or reason, and that the mysterious stranger he saw approaching was his successor. So, when Leonard Helstone was ushered by an Albanian youth, apparently the only menial in the establishment, into the Consul's presence, he was received more as an invader than a visitor. But when the new arrival introduced himself in the latter capacity, and as one impelled by no other motive than that of curiosity, the wearer of the oak-leaf band came down from his position as an outraged dignitary to his natural character of a very mild man, whose innate mildness solitude and conscious poverty had considerably matured.

Helstone paid a very short visit. The past presented no pleasant associations to make him linger about the place, and the present certainly offered no inducement to him to stay. The Consul had been so accustomed to depend upon his own self for company, that he had quite lost the knack of

talking to any one else. He had a way of commencing a sentence aloud, and finishing the rest off to himself; and in the middle of one of these confidential soliloquies Helstone left him, to prosecute the search for Pomp.

He had not broached this subject, as he deemed it expedient that it should not be a noted fact hereafter, that he had been inquiring for the *quondam* dragoman. It might look nasty at some future time. So he resolved to trust to his memory to guide him to that worthy's mountain home, where he had taken refuge as a boy.

With this object, he proceeded through the wretched town, whose main street was also its main drain; and although it was not called the "*High Street*," it had still unmistakable claims to that title, in an olfactory sense. As he passed along he was an object of distrust to the dogs who paused in their search for offal, to look askance at him and growl; of curiosity to the men and women who rested from their occupation of doing nothing, to stare; and of terror to the children who hurriedly desisted from the manufacture of dirt pies, to rush to their mothers' skirts.

Such trifles, light as air, which would have amused, rather than disconcerted, any other man, Leonard Helstone chafed under. He hated to be growled at, or to be glared at, or to be run away from; and, for the nonce, he included growlers, starers, and fugitives in the same feeling of hatred as he strode on, returning the stares with scowls, and cutting over a dog or a dirt pie with his stick whenever he had a chance.

Just outside the town he passed the little cemetery where his father slept, in company with a Consul, a Consul's wife, a Consul's two children, a drowned British mariner given up by the waves, an officer who had been murdered by Albanian brigands, and an English lord who had caught a fever in the neighbouring marshes of Butrinto when on a shooting trip in his yacht. So completely, though, had the parent beaten and hammered out every particle of filial affection, that now, as Leonard Helstone walked past the mournful little plot of ground, there was no soft feeling prompting him to forgive, or drawing his footsteps towards his father's last resting-place. Not even a glance was bestowed to

see if it were cared for in that foreign and desolate land, and he passed on his way unheeding. Neither death nor time had wiped out those old scores, and he strode on breasting the Albanian hill-side.

Arrived at the top, he took a survey of the country which stretched before him, as far as he could see, in a succession of barren-looking hills, rising one after another with the monotony and regularity of waves of the sea. There were no paths. When people wanted to go to a place they took a straight line to it across country, as there were no spots sacred to cultivation to be avoided—no boundaries or landmarks to turn aside for.

As he looked at the dreary waste of land before him, some of the old features of the landscape which he had at first failed to recognise, gradually came back to him, and, descending the hill, he shaped his course for his old refuge.

A walk of three or four hours brought him to the spot, but there was no "Pomp" there. The dwelling had fallen to ruin, and was tenanted by a wild-looking goatherd, whose soul was unable to soar above goats, and who

was utterly incapable of imparting any information whatever on any subject, except that one relating to those animals. This was perplexing and annoying, so Helstone retraced his steps slowly, determined, if possible, to elicit the whereabouts of his friend from any native he might chance to meet ; or if unsuccessful in this, to make inquiries in the town. It must be explained that he remembered sufficient of the Romaic language to understand, and be understood. He had not to go as far as the town, however, for a guide turned up in a way that was as unexpected as it was disagreeable. As he passed a projecting mass of rock, a tall, powerful-looking Albanian, dressed in the picturesque garb of his country, and armed with a matchlock, suddenly emerged from behind it, and confronted him.

“Where are you going?” asked the man, in a mixture of Greek and Italian.

Helstone saw that his interrogator was not a particularly peaceful customer, and he replied that he was returning to the town, at the same time making a move in that direction.

"No, you're not!" said the Albanian, defiantly, and handling the matchlock. "You're coming with me!"

Helstone was by no means deficient in pluck. The story of the murdered British officer flashed before him, and he was about to grapple with the man for the possession of the weapon which made its holder, for the time being, master of the occasion, when he was pinned by the arms from behind, by some unseen foe. Simultaneously, his adversary in front seized him by the throat, and in their combined grasp he was as helpless as a child. He struggled desperately to free himself, but with each struggle the arms were wrenched farther back, until he felt as if they were being torn out of their sockets, and the dark muscular fingers closed tighter on his throat, while his resistance lit up a fierce glare in the eyes in front of him, which meant murder on a little more provocation, as strongly as a look could.

"Recollect! we're not to kill him!" said the man behind, who could only be heard and felt, but not seen, by Helstone. "Tell

him to come along quietly, and we won't kill him—at least, not yet.”

The man in front, who was thus constituted spokesman by the other—in virtue, perhaps, of his position—repeated the above intimation slowly, suppressing, however, the latter reservation. On this, his “pal” grunted approvingly behind Helstone's back, and gave an extra wrench of his arms, as if to fix his attention to the speech.

“If you come along quietly with us,” repeated the spokesman, “we won't hurt you.” and here he relaxed for a moment his grip on Helstone's throat, just to give him a taste of the sweets of liberty, having previously put on an extra screw of the vice to define the difference all the sharper between it and captivity. “But, if you don't, we'll”—and here the grasp tightened to agony, and he looked significantly down at a murderous *yataghan*, stuck into the folds of his girdle.

This was so forcibly put, and all the accessories chimed in so disagreeably with the threat, that no one but a foolhardy simpleton would have failed to see it; and Leonard Helstone gasped out a promise to submit

quietly, upon which the fingers were withdrawn from his throat, and his arms were allowed to resume their proper position by his side.

No time was lost. His two captors at once reversed their positions. The man from behind, who had no firearm, led the way in front, and the man with the match-lock, after having explained its use in a telling pantomime, took his place in the rear; and in this order they proceeded for miles at a quick pace, Helstone employing himself, as he walked, in wondering what the end of it all was to be, and tracing back the whole cause of the dilemma, as usual, to his "cursed poverty."

After about three hours' walking, the man in front came to a sudden halt, and two more men appeared on the scene with the same abruptness as the first two had done.

After a short whispered parley, he was handed over to the fresh arrivals, who took him onwards in the same way, while his original captors retraced their steps.

In this manner, handed over to fresh escorts about every two or three hours, he

was made to press on for the whole day; without being allowed more than a minute or two's rest at each change. And at last, in the dusk of the evening, too weary and faint to have paid much attention to how he got over the last few miles of ground, he found himself in a regular robbers' cave, such as he had read of as a boy, and in the presence of quite a patriarchal-looking old man, with a snow-white beard, and a venerable aspect.

"You're an Englishman, eh?" said the venerable old brigand sharply, and with a tolerably good English accent, as he commenced business with the usual preliminary catechism.

There was something in the tones of the voice which brought a flush of animation into Helstone's face. He looked up curiously at his interrogator for a moment, and then, with an exclamation of surprise, advanced quickly towards him.

"Aha!" said the old man, springing up with an agility that contrasted strangely with his white beard, and whipping out a shining *yataghan* from his girdle with a fierceness

that contrasted still more strangely with his venerable aspect.

"Don't you know me? I'm Leonard Helstone, Consul Helstone's son!"

The yataghan flew into its sheath, and, with a curse for the father and a blessing on the son in the same breath, the old chief threw his arms round the captive's neck.

It was Pomp! Yes, by all that was wonderful, coincidental, and strange, it was Pomp, late dragoman, now a bandit chief!

His joy at recognising his former young friend was quite sincere. Hoary old scoundrel as he was, he had never forgotten the ill-used boy who had sought his protection, and the very best cheer in the way of food and drink that the cave afforded was placed before him.

After the pangs of hunger and thirst had been allayed, and while certain unkempt and unshorn members of the band sprawled and lay about the outer portion of the cave, Helstone and the ex-dragoman sat in an inner sort of a chamber, hewn out of the rock, a sort of *sanctum sanctorum*, where they had

quite a snug evening of it, with the enlivening concomitants of tobacco and whiskey.

"What a queer ending to what, an hour or two ago, seemed a very ugly business," thought Helstone, as he watched his old friend making his hospitable preparations. "It could not have turned out better. Everything seems cut and dried for my purpose. The job will be quite in his line of business."

"So you went to the old place to find me out, eh?" said the old chief, sipping his whiskey just as a Christian might have done. It was an accomplishment picked up with wonderful aptitude in his intercourse with civilization, and which he had carried back with him, on his return to barbarism, and had kept up perseveringly through all the changing scenes of life. "So you went to the old place, and you hadn't forgotten me, eh?"

"How do you know I went there?"

The old man smiled with a grim kind of pride, as he said, "How do I know it? Why, how do I know that you arrived in a cutter yacht in the bay, two hours after sun-

rise this morning ; that you landed at about nine o'clock, went to the Consulate—pish !” (and here he spat after mentioning the place) “ then you walked to the old hut where I took you in,—I ought to have guessed *then* who you were ; and then, a short time after that, you were taken by two of my men, and brought on here at once. How do I know all that, eh ?”

“ I can't tell, for you've spoken to no one but me since I was brought in, and I'm sure no messenger could have come along quicker than we did,” said Helstone, looking down ruefully at his feet, which were blistered, cut, and swollen.

“ Messenger !” said the old man. “ Why, I knew everything I've told you, half an hour after it happened. It's thirty English miles, if it's a yard, from here to the bay where your yacht lies, and yet I knew of her arrival in a little more than half an hour after she dropped anchor. Why, I've a regular look-out system all over the country, and information of anything particular is passed on to me from hill to hill by signs in a very short time.”

“ Well, but you must have rather a puzzling system of signalling,” said Helstone.

“ No,” said the old man, “ it’s very simple, but it’s quite enough for ordinary purposes.”

“ Ah, but suppose there was something *extraordinary*, that they couldn’t signal, what then ?”

The chief gave a whistle, and out of a dark corner of the cave issued a fierce Albanian dog, explaining, by his presence, to Helstone, the cause of a low accompaniment of growls he had heard all through the conversation.

“ There !” said the old brigand. “ You talked of a messenger. There’s one for you ! We’ve got three of them. One here, and two out. Supposing the two men nearest to where you landed this morning, had had anything particular they wished to tell, but couldn’t signal, they would at once have written it on a piece of paper, and tied it round the neck of a dog, if there was one there, or if there wasn’t, they’d have signalled for one, and very soon have one of the two outside ones ; and I’d have sent old ‘ Chico ’ here on to meet him at a post about half

way, and the men there would have tied the message on to him, and he'd have brought it back as hard as he could, -wouldn't you, Chico? There, go and lie down; you're not wanted now."

"Wonderful!" said Helstone; "do you often use them?"

"Yes, not that there's often any occasion to, but we use them to keep them hardy, and to prevent their forgetting what they've been taught," was the reply.

There was no doubt that Pomp, when he took to the road, or rather to the mountains, had struck on his *forte*. He was an ornament to his profession, and had turned out a very Von Moltke for organisation. Claude Duval was a bungling burglar compared to him!

"I don't go out much now, I arrange nearly everything from here. They sent, about a year ago, a company of Turkish soldiers from Antivari after us," said Pomp, bursting with glee; "Allah! it was as good as a game of '*cinque*.' The dogs of soldiers had been in quarters for months, doing nothing but lying on straw, smoking all day and drinking *rakee* half the night. Such a dance we led them

all about these mountains! and killed off about a third of them from fatigue. When they started they had hardly any boots to their feet, which soon got cut and blistered, and they used to travel at the rate of about four or five miles a day, and they were going to take us by surprise!—*us*! *me*! *ME*!!—*I* who knew almost how many pipes of tobacco the officer commanding them smoked every day. Ha, ha, ha! they gave it up after a month, and returned to Antivari, and I went in there, dressed as a merchant from Janina, to hear what they said about it, and the officer reported that the *kleftis** had been dispersed and rooted out, and that all was quiet in the mountains. Ha, ha, ha! but that wasn't the best of it! I—I was had up before the Bey, as a merchant who had just travelled through that part of the country from Janina, and I corroborated the officer's words, and swore I hadn't seen the shadow of a *klefti*, although I had passed through with valuable bales of merchandise; and on the strength of this, several merchants started the next day, and *all* fell into my hands. Ha, ha, ha!" and the

* Robbers.

old man drank off a glass of whiskey with a flourish as if toasting his own transcendent abilities.

From such a man Helstone could no longer keep his plan, and he divulged it to Pomp, who listened with glistening eyes and a watering mouth.

"And *you'll* get it all if *he* is out of the way, eh?" he asked.

"In all probability, yes," was the reply. "Will you do it?"

"Do it? Of course I will! And do it so as it will never be traced, too."

"Look here," said Helstone, with a miserable subterfuge, "I don't wish murder to be committed—downright murder, for I should never forgive myself then." (The old man grinned.) "But if you get him here, it's impossible, in his present state of health, that he can survive the hardship and exposure for long."

"My dear," said the old man, "he shall have the dampest and draughtiest corner of the cave to sleep in, and if that doesn't do, we'll try other measures."

"But no violence, mind!"

"Of course not," and the old man grinned again.

For hours they sat discussing the scheme, and at last, when the night and the whiskey were far spent, they agreed that Helstone was to stay where he was, so as to excite by his absence an uneasiness in Clennell, who, in all probability, would come and search for him, and *then* their course would be easy enough. Clennell would quietly be ensnared in the toils prepared for him, and Helstone would make the best of his way over land, under the guidance of one of the band, to Cattaro, a place on the Dalmatian coast, where he could pick up one of the coasting steamers to Trieste, and so back to England, where he could follow up the game, and receive reports from his fellow-ruffian.

For this service Pomp was of course to receive something rather more substantial than thanks. There is no doubt that, notwithstanding the villany of his nature, there was a wondrous affection for Helstone, but such a thing couldn't be done *all* for love. It was neither all for love, nor all for greed, but a little of one, and a great deal of the other.

Besides, the job was purely a professional one; and no one ever thinks of rendering, or receiving, professional services entirely *gratis*.

"I suppose he will come to look for you, or do you think he may just go about his business without bothering his head about you any farther?" asked Pomp.

Helstone had seen enough of Clennell to feel convinced that, ill as he was, his generous, manly spirit would never allow him to desert a friend, or, at all events, what *he* considered a friend. As he thought of this, and of how he was using a kind service for the undoing of him who was rendering it, the good angel, ever on the look out, seized the opportunity to knock gently at his heart, and strove to make a last appeal, but ambition drove him back, and the struggle brought to Helstone's cheek a crimson flush of something like shame, as he answered, "No, I'm certain that, as sure as you're sitting there, he'll come if he's alive!"

There was nothing more to arrange for the present; so the conference was broken up, and Helstone, throwing himself on a bed of skins

and rugs which had been prepared for him, slept until late in the morning.

When he awoke, his host, recollecting an Englishman's weakness for water, told him that there was a stream outside where he could perform his morning ablution, and that he would wait breakfast for him.

This work of supererogation—as it was in the eyes of Pomp, for it was a relic of civilisation he had not carried into the desert together with the accomplishment of whiskey drinking—having been concluded, they sat down to their morning meal, which, to Helstone's agreeable surprise, consisted, amongst other delicacies, some of a garlicky nature, of coffee with milk hot from the goat, a wild boar's ham home-cured, and black bread, which was better than it looked. In fact, the old brigand, as became his warlike life, lived like a "fighting cock."

Helstone did ample justice to the meal, to the delight of the host and the cook—the latter a luxurious institution of very recent introduction. He was an Italian sailor of the name of Francesco, who had had the misfortune to stab a man to the heart in a brawl at Zante.

"Two men landed from your yacht this morning," said Pomp, "and went to the Consulate."

He would have spat as usual at the very mention of the name, but his mouth was full of wild boar, so he swallowed it and his pride together, instead.

"I suppose to inquire for me?" said Helstone.

"Yes, I told them to keep a good look out and signal anything else."

A little later in the day, it was passed on that the two men, together with the Consul himself, and one or two others, were walking several miles inland, making inquiries of every one they saw; and in the afternoon, that they had returned, and that the yacht had set sail for Corfu, apparently.

"That's all right, so far," said Pomp, "they'll be back again, and bring your friend along with them, most likely."

Pomp was right. He was seldom wrong in his plans of rascality. Two days after, the intelligence was passed on from hill top to hill top, that the yacht had returned, and that a party had landed. Then, it being of sufficient

importance, the dogs were called into requisition, and late in the evening Chico brought back a piece of paper on which was jotted down in Greek the result of the morning's observations as follows :—

"The party are moving inland. One of them, a young Englishman, looks ill, and walks slowly. He fainted once, after two or three hours' walking, but he still struggles on. They've been obliged to get a horse for him."

"That's *him*!" said Pomp with a chuckle, as he and Helstone eagerly scanned the dirty scrap of paper.

Pomp looked wickedly exultant. Helstone was deadly pale, and a pang of remorse swept across his soul for a moment, as he read, "But he still struggles on."

He had gone too far to recede now though. "Give me some whiskey," he said hoarsely.

"Ay," said Pomp; "some whisky, Francesco! We'll drink to his speedy release from illness and pain and fainting, eh?"

As he handed his glass back to Francesco, after having tossed off its raw contents at one gulp, he said to Helstone with a demoniacal

grin, "On a horse, is he? I'll send orders to have it taken away from him as soon as they've taken him, and make him walk all the way, eh?"


Helstone said nothing, but he held out his glass for more.

Oh, how the good angel was striving and wrestling with the bad one! And he might have been victorious, but for that accursed drink!

Again the words, "But he still struggles on" smote reproachfully across Helstone's conscience, and the soft dew of compassion fell gently on his heart, but in a moment it was scorched up before the fiery breath of the demon, drink!

CHAPTER VII.

THE INDIAN LETTER.

“ OLD me, Kitty! hold me, or I shall go into convulsions! I've seen an apparition. Oh, snakes! old 'Left-wheel-into-line' in boots and breeches! What a caution! Oh, Lor', I shall go off into high-strikes if I don't have a nip of something! It's been too much for my nerves. Old 'Step-back-twelve-inches' bust out into a cockade! Oh, Lor'!”

These incoherent ejaculations proceeded from Reggy Brunton, as the reader has probably already concluded from the style, as he rushed into Kit Trevor's room one afternoon, and threw himself on the small portable bed in a paroxysm of astonishment and mirth.

"Well, and why shouldn't he?" asked Kitty Trevor, slightly nettled. "I suppose a fellow can dress his servant as he likes. I can't see anything so deucedly amusing in it. I wish I could, particularly when the bill comes in."

"Don't be riled, Kitty!" said Brunton, without abating his merriment one jot. "I can't help it. He looks such a rum 'un in anything but his 'millingtary togs.' I should as soon have thought of seeing the Archbishop of Canterbury in pink tights!"

"Don't be an ass, Reggy!" said Kit impatiently, as Brunton still continued his mirth at Mr. Swivel's expense. "If it's so absurd and ridiculous, you'd better not come out."

"I wouldn't miss it for worlds, my dear fellow! No," said Brunton, as he helped himself to a small glass of Kitty's Cognac, which that youth's fond mother, with a recollection of his juvenile predilection for unripe fruit, had enjoined him always to keep in his room—"No, it shall never be said of Reginald Brunton, that he would share a friend's liquor, and not his danger—no, never! Besides, I wish to see how 'Jack-of-all-trades,'

and old 'Extension-motions' acquit themselves in their new capacities."

"Come along then ; are you ready?" asked Kit, taking up a bran new driving whip, and lighting one of his biggest cigars. "Recollect ! if you show any unbecoming levity, I'll shoot you into the first wet ditch we come across."

The meaning of all this was that Kitty Trevor had broken out into a dog-cart of the lightest and neatest description, in the shafts of which Jack-of-all-trades was to figure, in the new capacity of a "harness horse, quiet to drive ;" and, to add to the honour and glory of the thing, Mr. Swivel had been arrayed, to Brunton's intense amusement, in the neat, but not gaudy, dress of a gentleman's groom of the period, in which—as Brunton put it—he certainly *did* look rather a "rum 'un."

"We'll start from the stables, Reggy. It's as well not to have a 'gallery,' in case everything doesn't go off smoothly at first," said Kit, for the occasion was an important one. Jack-of-all-trades' capabilities in the new sphere had not as yet been put to the test, but from

the readiness with which he had always hitherto adapted himself to circumstances, Kit Trevor augured favourably of the result of the coming trial.

Hitherto, he had been without reproach. He had not only, when required, consented quietly, and even cheerfully, to being hacked to cover and back again ; but had performed his work in the interval honestly and well from find to finish, refusing nothing he was ridden at—which was saying a good deal, considering who was on his back—making fewer mistakes, and giving his owner fewer falls than an animal five times his price might have done ; and he evidently thought that this was as much as ought to be expected from him, or any other horse.

It was manifestly not only his opinion that on the present occasion he was being “put upon,” but it was also apparent that it was his intention to resent the attempt, for—Kit and Brunton having taken their seats—on being presented with his head by Swivel, at Kit’s bidding, instead of at once going off with dash and *éclat*, he stood perfectly still for some moments, as if considering in what

way he could make himself most disagreeable, and then, as if having settled that, on the whole, a retrograde movement might perhaps be as annoying as anything else, commenced to back, regardless of Kitty's chirrup and a few gentle admonitions from the whip, until the back of the dog-cart was rammed violently against the stable wall, slightly to Mr. Swivel's personal discomfort, and to the detriment of his new boots.

Having used the cart as a species of battering-ram against every available and adjacent object in turn, not forgetting the pump, he looked round the stable yard, and seeing that he had about exhausted its resources, consented to break into an uncomfortable trot in the required direction, evidently consoling himself as he went along with the idea that he would find fresh opportunities outside of making himself unpleasant.

Although trotting at all was decidedly a concession on his part, he took care to do it in such a particularly disagreeable manner, as to leave no doubt whatever that he was only doing it all the time under protest. He went along, turning his head from side to side

as if looking out for something to run into or up against, and twisting his long body about in a way that communicated an extremely uncomfortable "wobbling" motion to the cart, and set its occupants nodding as if they were surrounded by crowds of acquaintances whom they were exceedingly anxious not to offend by cutting.

Of the three, Mr. Swivel had decidedly the worst of it. The cart was not properly balanced, and his arms being folded, according to Kitty's strict injunction, he had a horrible time of it, sitting on a shining, sloping seat, from which nearly every motion unshipped him.

In this way—compound fracture staring them in the face at every step, as Brunton dismally put it—they got out on to the turnpike road, where Jack-of-all-trades varied his game a little. Selecting a spot where they had been recently macadamizing, he came to a gradual stop, as if it were merely his desire to follow the general precept of going "gently over the stones," and then, after a few moments, and when all were taken off their guard, he jumped forward with a sudden

snatch at his collar, which shot the unfortunate Mr. Swivel on to the stones, where he sat thinking deeply for some moments, until he at last came to the conclusion that he must have fallen out.

Kitty Trevor and Brunton pulled up as soon as they were able to for laughing, and we have it on the authority of the latter, with what truth we cannot vouch, that even Jack-of-all-trades at this juncture turned his head round and indulged in a horse laugh.

"You had better hold on to the rail," said Kit, as Swivel clambered on to his seat again, with even more than his usual stiffness.

There was no occasion to repeat the suggestion. Swivel at once clutched the rail with a nervous grasp, which never relaxed for a single moment for the remainder of the drive.

After this, there was a marked improvement in the behaviour of Jack-of-all-trades, as if he had been put into a good humour by the little incident, and he went along so well and quietly, that it was considered enough had been done, by way of a first trial, and his head was turned homewards.

As they passed a cross road, every stone and curve of which was dear to Kitty's eyes, as it led to and from Lissington Towers, he descried the portly figure of old Walters, coming leisurely down, in a dog-cart ; and he pulled up with such a sudden jerk, that Mr. Swivel nearly performed the extraordinary feat of kicking off his own hat.

"Well, Walters, and what's the news with you ?" asked Kitty, cheerily, as the old servant turned the corner and ranged up alongside.

"Just a-coming with a letter to you, Master Trevor, I was," replied Walters, handing over a little pink note, which somehow seemed to reflect its colour in Kitty's cheeks, "and I was to wait for an answer."

"Oh, all right," said Kitty, taking the note, and pocketing it with an unnatural and overdone assumption of indifference, "as we're so near barracks, you had better come to my quarters, and I'll read it there, and give you an answer."

"All right, Master Trevor!" and old Walters dropped behind, and followed in Jack-of-all-trades' wake.

Walters persisted in calling Kit "Master Trevor," notwithstanding all that young gentleman's efforts to impress him with a sense of his manhood. But although the enormity of the offence was very great, it could not shake the liking Kitty felt for the old man, nor undermine the good understanding which existed between them. They had of late become fast allies. They had a pet subject in common which bound them together. Old Walters was never tired of talking of his young mistress, and Kitty Trevor never tired of listening.

"Here, give me the reins!" said Brunton, taking them out of Kitty's by no means reluctant hands. "That letter will be burning a hole in your pocket if you don't take it out and read it."

Kitty submitted with a blush and a laugh, and perused his note, which was short and sweet, and merely said :

"DEAR MR. TREVOR,—You know we have been very anxious lately about Fred Clennell, as we had not heard from him since he wrote that letter telling us he was coming

home at once. We have, however, just received one from him which certainly is not calculated to lessen our anxiety. If you have nothing else to do, both mamma and myself wish you'd come this afternoon and give us your opinion about it. That old owl, Walters, is going to drive in with this. So you'll be able to drive back with him if you like. Of course you'll stay to dinner.—Sincerely yours,

“MAY CHICHESTER.

“Lissington Towers.”

“It must be a pretty long one, I should think, from the time you take over it,” said that obtrusive Reggy Brunton.

Kitty Trevor vouchsafed no reply, but still kept fondly spelling every word over and over again.

“Ah, I was just such another sad young dog in my day,” said Reggy, with a sigh for departed youth. He had just turned twenty-four.

“Do you recollect a fellow called Clennell at Eton?—you must have been there part of

the time with him ?”—asked Kitty, withdrawing his enraptured gaze.

“ Yes,” replied Brunton, “ with an effort I can carry my memory back through a long vista of years to the happy days when we were boys together. What of him ?”

“ Well, he’s a great friend of the Chiches-
ters, and of Bullekeley.

“ So you’ve told me a dozen times, Kit.”

“ Well, he wrote a long time ago to say he was coming home at once, and he didn’t turn up ; and now they’ve had another letter from him, and they want to hear what I think of it—that’s all. Here, give me back the reins !” and Kitty thrust the note into his breast-pocket—not the *side*-pocket, if you please—nor the *trousers*-pocket, nor the *waistcoat*-pocket, but the *breast*-pocket, where it could feel the throb of a heart which, though young and perhaps foolish, was loyal and true beyond its years.

The grass was not allowed to grow under Jack-of-all-trades’ hoofs, and Kitty was soon back in his quarters, engaged in putting a few finishing touches to his dress, and listening with rapture to old Walters, who

had been provided with a glass of beer, and was holding forth on the one absorbing topic.

"Well, as I was a-sayin', Master Trevor ——"

"Ahem!" Kit coughed gruffly, and lighted—though it embarrassed him very much in his dressing—one of his biggest cigars *at* Walters. "Just wait a moment, until I get this to draw properly! Well, yes?"

"It would have done your heart good to have seen it. Lor' bless you, Master Trevor——"

"Ahem! what's a good thing to keep razors in working order?" asked Kit, rattling an imposing-looking razor-case at Walters.

"Ah, well, you see it's from them lyin' by idle. Of course you ain't got no use for 'em yet?"

"Haven't I though? By Jove, I wish I hadn't! It's a deuce of a nuisance at times—I'm not sure that I shouldn't be all the better for a scrape now."

"No; let 'em be, sir! let 'em be! You'll go cutting yourself if you play with them sharp tools. Lor', I mind the time well, when I used to play at shavin' with a' old

oyster-knife, but I couldn't come to much harm. I couldn't have cut myself with it if I had tried—but these *real* razors is dangerous playthings. Let 'em be awhile, Master Trevor. Let 'em be, sir!"

It was hopeless trying to convince a man who wouldn't believe his own senses, and if it hadn't been for association's sake, Kitty would very nearly have hated him.

"Well, as I was a-sayin', Master Trevor," continued Walters, this time uninterrupted by Kitty, who only feebly protested by blowing a cloud of tobacco-smoke at him, "it would have done your heart good to have seen her shakin' her long curls, and larfin', so merry-like, chieveyin' the butterflies, and a-fillin' her little self with blackberries, for all the world just like a little angel."

Here the old man paused to wipe his head, and linger with a smile over this angelic feat.

"Yes?" said Kitty, with breathless interest, "yes, and what then?"

"And then, when she'd get a bit tired, she'd say, shakin' her curly little head, just like this here" (here Walters gave a waggish imitation with his bald old poll), "'Where's my

cock-horse?' says she. 'Bring my cock-horse;' and I'd make believe to fetch him from behind a tree, or somewhere. But Lor' bless you, Master Trevor! it was only me all the time, and I'd stoop down, and she'd sit upon my back, and away we'd go to Banbury Cross—that was the stables—or to Lunnun town—that was the South lodge. Oh, dear! oh, dear!"

Kit felt as if he would have liked to have hugged Walters' great broad back!

"Yes, and used she to like that?"

"Like it! You might have heard her screechin' and larfin' for miles; and she'd lick me most fearful with a stick and a bit of string, or, maybe, the stalk of a wild flower, and spur me most awful with her little heels, and I'd make believe to kick and prance, and one day I kicked up a bit too high, and come plump down on my nose, through havin' my hands behind, to keep her from fallin' off; and when she sees the blood tricklin' from my nose she begins to cry a bit, and she puts her little arms round me, and she says, 'Oh, dear, Walters,' she says, 'let *me* carry you home now. It's your turn. You get on *my*

back,' and she catches hold of me by the knees—she couldn't reach no higher—and tries for to h'ist me on her back."

This reminiscence was so touching that the narrator had to stop to blow his nose, and Kitty was visibly affected as he murmured, "Go on!"

"Then, when she'd got a bit older, Master Trevor, her uncle, Cap'en Tom, then quite a little b-o-oy hisself, give her a pony, and I was the first to learn her how to ride. Ah, and how well I mind the first day she ever jumped! I was walkin' alongside the pony, listenin' to her talk about fairies and buttercups, and such like, when all on a suddent she turns the pony's head, and puts him right at the ha-ha, and the pony, through not havin' run enough at it, jumps a bit awkward-like, and gives her a nasty fall, and my heart well nigh stood still as I see her little head and her white frock all mixed up anyhow with his heels; but she ups in a moment, before I can reach her, and catches hold of the bridle,—'Oh, Miss May!' I says, hardly able to speak as I see her little face as pale as a lily, and the blood runnin' from a

cut in her mouth. 'Oh, Miss May, come home!' I says. 'No,' says she, 'not yet, Walters, not *yet*!' she says, as she ups on to the pony again like a fairy—just like this here" (and old Walters lifted a ponderous leg about two inches from the floor, and let it slowly down again). "'Miss May,' I says, 'you're never——' 'Yes I am, though,' she says, and before I can say 'Jack Robinson,' she sends the pony as hard as he can split at the ha-ha again. I shuts my eyes, and don't open 'em till I hear a little laugh on the other side, and she says, '*Now* we'll go home; only don't frighten mamma,' says she. 'Wipe my mouth first, Walters!' Bless her little heart! Ah, they're a good plucked lot, them Bullekeleys!"

By this time, Kit being ready, and his evening clothes having been put into the dog-cart—there was always Tom's room for him to dress in—they started for the hall, old Walters resuming the reminiscences with the first revolution of the wheels, and never leaving off until they did.

Little May Chichester looked rather red about the eyes, and her mother looked rather

serious as she said, "I'm so glad you've come, Mr. Trevor. This last letter of Fred Clennell's has made us think that he's very—dangerously—ill, and we would like you just to read it, and say what you think. Show him the letter, May, dear!"

May took the letter from her pocket and handed it to Kit Trevor, as she said :

"He's even too ill to write, and it's written from his dictation by some one else, who keeps putting in little remarks of his own in the most extraordinary manner."

Kit read the letter to himself, which was as follows :—

"Albany Barracks, Purghatorree.

"MY DEAR MAY,—I've been very ill since I last wrote to you, and this must be a very short letter, as, although I'm getting better, I'm still very weak—so much so, in fact, that you will receive this in the handwriting of a brother officer, who is kind enough to write for me. *Not a bit of it!* The object of this letter is to ask you to befriend and look after a poor little orphan, named Jessie Gibson,

whose parents have both died out here. Her father was a Sergeant in my company, and I promised him on his death-bed to do all I could for his child. I am sending her home at once by the Cape, in the hired troopship 'Copenhagen,' which ought to arrive at Portsmouth in about six weeks or two months after you receive this. You can get an agent there to telegraph the arrival of the ship; and will you send some one to meet the little girl, and take her under your protection until I come home, which, please God, will be soon—if he only keeps quiet. I'm sure you and Mrs. Chichester will do this for my sake, and when you see the child, and know her a little, you'll do it for hers, for she's a quiet, taking little thing. *So she is, faith!*"

"I may be home myself before her, but there's no knowing what may happen, and if she arrives first, I know you'll do this for me.

"I cannot go on any more, as my amanuensis strikes work and refuses to write another word. *You see I'm the doctor as well, and though he's getting on first rate, he must not be allowed to bother and excite himself, and*

he must be kept quiet. Love to Mrs. Chichester.—Ever your affectionate friend,

“FRED CLENNELL.”

“Well, and what do you think of it, Mr. Trevor?” asked May.

Kit always looked on the bright side of everything, so he said—

“Well, Miss Chichester, I don’t think it’s such bad news, on the whole ; in fact, rather the contrary—and I’ve no doubt we’ll see Fred Clennell here amongst us in a few weeks.”

“Do you really think so? I don’t like that ‘but there’s no knowing what may happen.’ It looks rather as if he were taking a desponding view himself.”


“Oh no!” said Kit. “It only means the steamer may break down, or he mayn’t get his leave signed in time, or something of that sort—that’s all.”

CHAPTER VIII.

ADIEU ! MY DAINTIEST DREAM.

"I must tell her before we part :
I must tell her or die."

Tennyson.

T was evidently only on principle that Jack-of-all-trades had made himself so very disagreeable on the occasion of his first appearance in the shafts ; for after that day when he had provided Mr. Swivel with a temporary lodging on the hard stones, he showed no refractory symptoms whatever, but accepted his new position with his usual equanimity.

The scene of his labours in his new capacity was confined almost exclusively to that tract of macadamized ground which lay between the barracks and Lissington Towers, for there

were few days on which Kitty Trevor could not devise some excuse for turning up in the afternoon, either for a game of croquet, which he hated in the abstract ; or a cup of five o'clock tea, which invariably took away his appetite for dinner ; or his dancing lesson, which was unalloyed bliss.

Frequent as his visits were, he never seemed to intrude or to be in the way. The little fellow was so natural, so full of fun, and, withal, such a perfect little gentleman, that it was impossible that he could ever appear intrusive.

Reggy Brunton was often a passenger in the dog-cart, and it was quite refreshing to see the young reprobate sipping his cup of tea, just like a respectable member of society, and having a quiet chat with gentle Mrs. Chichester.

As the two friends would sit together behind Jack-of-all-trades, on their way to these afternoon visits, they would generally converse in their usual gay and light-hearted manner. On a certain day, however, a few weeks after Jack's first appearance in the shafts, they both sat in the cart, glum and

gloomy, and neither spoke except to burst out occasionally into such ejaculations as— "Cursed bore! just as one was getting to know people so well!" "Why the devil don't they let us stay where we are?" "Infernal tradesmen will be getting troublesome!" &c., &c.

In this unhappy mood they arrived at Lissington Towers, when Reggy Brunton, with great feeling and tact, insisted on Kit's going in by himself, while he strolled about the grounds for a little.

"Why, what's the matter?" said May, as she caught sight of Kit's long face. "Has Vic been shot by a keeper? or has Jack thrown out a curb? It must be something very dreadful."

"Well, so it is, Miss Chichester," replied Kitty. "We are going away from Hurlingford."

"No?" said both May and her mother, incredulously.

The light of Kitty's bright countenance had become quite a necessity, and they could not realise its taking itself off to other scenes.

"Yes, we are, though, Mrs. Chichester.

The '*route*' has come, and we are to hold ourselves in readiness to proceed at once to Gibraltar."

"Gibraltar! good gracious!" said May. "I thought you were going to say Aldershot, or Portsmouth at the farthest. What a way off! And when do you think you'll go?"

"In a fortnight, or three weeks at the most," replied Kitty, ruefully.

"Oh dear! you'll be leaving us with your imperfections still thick upon you. You haven't half learned how to play croquet yet."

"Poor old Walters will be heart-broken," said Mrs. Chichester.

"And you'll miss Fred Clennell—what a pity!" said May.

"And there won't be any one to drop in and tell us the news," said her mother.

"And you were beginning to copy music so nicely, and to learn your notes, and to dance without endangering the lives and limbs of your partners," said May. "And there will be no one to complete the education of Vic's little son."

"In fact, I don't know what we shall do without you," sighed Mrs. Chichester.

"And I'm sure neither do *I*," echoed May.

This was all very harrowing to Kitty, and he looked the picture of despair as he said—

"And I'm sure I don't know what *I* shall do without *you*, Miss Chichester—ahem! and you, Mrs. Chichester. You've always been so kind to me."

It afforded him a melancholy sort of pleasure to see that his news had cast a gloom over his friends at the Towers. As to poor old Walters, he was "struck all of a heap" at the sad intelligence.

"Lor' a' mussy!" exclaimed the old man; "goin' to furrin parts? Well, I *am* sorry. No fightin', I hope, sir?"

"No," replied Kit.

"Ah, well, then it's fever, I suppose," said Walters, with an ominous shake of the head. "When it ain't fightin' in furrin parts, it's fever, and when it ain't fever it's fightin', and more often it's both. You'll feel a bit strange and lonely like, Master Trevor, out of the old country?"

"Yes, I dare say I shall, Walters ; but you have it in your power to cheer me up a good deal, if you'll do it."

"Lord love you ! O' course I will, if I can, sir. But how ?"

"Why, if you'll write to me sometimes, and tell me all that's going on here, and all about Miss May. It will be such a consolation to hear all about old friends, Walters."

"O' course I will, sir !" said Walters, readily ; and he was afterwards as good as his word.

Later on Reggy Brunton made his appearance, and after a time the two friends drove back to barracks together, silent and thoughtful.

"What are you thinking of, Reggy ?" at last asked Kitty, seeking, in conversation, relief from his own thoughts, which were becoming insupportable.

"The big drum," replied Reggy, gloomily.

"*The big drum !* What the deuce do you mean ?"

"Yes, I always thought old Weller's idea of getting Pickwick out of the Fleet in a piano without works, a capital one ; and I don't see why I shouldn't put a military adaptation upon

it, and apply it to the big drum, for I don't know how I'm to get out of the country, and give some of my friends in trade the 'go by,' unless some brilliant and novel stratagem is adopted. What do you think of the big drum plan, Kitty? Is it practicable, do you think? I'm rather afraid it might be too heavy for the drummer, although I might assist him a little in his duties, you know, by beating internally. What do you think, or can you suggest any other way?"

The first thing that Kitty *did* suggest, was that his purse, as far as it would go, should be placed at the disposal of his friend; but this was gratefully, but determinedly, declined.

"In the first place, Kit, old boy," said Brunton, "I hate borrowing from a friend, although I don't mind doing so from Jews. In the second, and I hope you won't think I'm looking a gift—or at all events an *offered*—horse in the mouth, what you could lend me would only be a drop in the ocean, for I owe a pot of money one way and another; and, in the third place, I'd rather like to do those infernal Israelites!"

The subject then dropped, and they both

returned to their own thoughts, Kit, to wonder how he would ever manage to exist twelve hundred miles away from Lissington Towers ; Reggy, to devise some deep plan of escape from his creditors.

There was soon a general rush for leave in the regiment, for the purpose of wishing friends and relatives "good-bye." But as *seniores priores* was the rule, and poor little Kit was at the very foot of the ladder, he was obliged to stay where he was ; which coming to the ears of the Chichesters, they insisted upon, not only papa and mamma Trevor, but also the whole string of little Trevors, male and female, paying a visit to Lissington, in order that the family might see as much as possible of the "dear boy" before he set out on his travels. A goodly string of them there was, indeed, and one such as only a country clergyman can twine round him. There was Carry, the eldest, a year older than Kit, the family treasure, and assistant mamma ; there was Fanny, a year younger than Kit, and very much like him, a mild-eyed, unsophisticated little creature ; and then there was a very gradually descending scale of alternate

boys and girls down to a toddling infant. Kit, being a dutiful son and an affectionate brother, was of course the greater part of every day at Lissington, and the regularity with which Reggy Brunton accompanied him, spoke volumes for his friendship, except to those who discerned that the magnet of attraction was evidently the mild-eyed little Fanny Trevor. As the dreaded day drew nearer and nearer, Kit seemed so changed and out of spirits, that the parents remarked to each other that they had no idea the "dear boy" would have felt leaving them so.

There was evidently something more than filial affection, though, at the root of Kitty's unhappiness ; and at last, on the very afternoon before they were to march, when he and May happened to be alone together, he made an effort to throw off some of the weight pressing on his mind.

"You won't forget me, Miss Chichester, when I'm far away, will you ?" he began, after looking very uneasy for some moments.

"No, of course I shan't, Mr. Trevor," replied May, warmly.

"I—I never shall forget *you*, Miss Chiches-

ter. Is it likely I should, when you are more to me than my father and mother and brothers and sisters all put together ?”

This was such a bold plunge that it took away Kitty’s breath for some moments, and he then continued : “ I know I’m young, but——”

“ I dare say you’ll grow,” said May, comfortingly.

“ You called me ridiculously young once,” said the boy, taking her hand in his, while his voice trembled.

May began to get frightened at his earnestness, so she told a fib and said, “ No, she didn’t.”

“ Yes, you did, Miss Chichester ; you’ve forgotten it, but *I* never forget a single word you say. Yes, I may be young, but this I know, that I’m old enough to be certain that I never will love any one but you ; and I swear it. Miss Chichester—May, I’m going away to-morrow, for years, perhaps ; let me carry away with me some hope that when I come back—and I shall be older then—that you’ll return my love. Do give me that to look forward to when I’m far away from you.”

The boy stood up, pale and trembling, awaiting an answer ; and May, after giving him a little scared glance, burst into tears.

“Will you ? May I take that little hope away with me, May Chichester ?”

“Oh, Mr. Trevor!” sobbed May, “I’ll always, always love you as a brother ; but don’t let’s talk any more about anything else.”

“Do you feel you can’t give me this hope, then ?”

“I—I don’t think so.”

“Why ?” asked Kit, almost inaudibly, for his trembling lips could hardly form the words.

There was no reply.

“Why ?” he repeated. But still May was silent. “Is it that there’s some one else you like ?” he asked.

Still there was no answer, although Kit bent his head down close to the blushing, tear-bedewed face, to catch the slightest sound.

A light seemed suddenly to break upon him ; or, rather we should say, a dark cloud appeared to come between him and all that was bright and happy.

“Is it that you already care for Fred Clennell ?” he asked.

The last two words seemed to recall May to herself, for she lifted up her head, and, looking him full and fair in the face, allowed a timid "Yes" to drop from her lips. "But," she continued, "I'll always love you dearly, dearly, as a brother," and she gave her soft little hand to Kit, who put it up to his cold quivering lips, and then dropped it.

"And I," he said, "will always love you as truly and as fondly as if you had given me the hope I asked for."

He did not look so ridiculously young *then* ; and if old Walters could have seen him, he would, doubtless, have conferred the title of "Mr." upon him on the spot.

"Hullo, Kitty, my boy! I've run over from Hawley to see the last of you," said Tom, as he burst in upon them, and clapped Kit on the shoulder.

Kit, for the first and last time in his life, thought Tom a bore.

CHAPTER IX.

GOOD-BYE, SWEETHEART, GOOD-BYE !



THE regiment was to march the whole way from Hurlingford to Portsmouth, where the transport lay awaiting it ; and although it was in reality a much more costly way of doing it than sending them by train, still it looked and sounded much cheaper, and hoodwinked the general public into the belief that army matters were managed much more economically than they used to be. Besides this, it answered another purpose. It inflicted a great deal of unnecessary discomfort, and even downright suffering, on a large body of men, and that is always an object to be aimed at ; perhaps with a view to making our warriors hardy.

The morning on which they were to start was a lovely and serene one in the early autumn ; and it had just “gone” seven as Tom Bullekeley pulled up, at a cross road, the largest wagonette the Lissington stables boasted of, containing the Chichesters, and the entire family of Trevors.

“We’re in lots of time,” said Tom, looking at his watch, “and they’re sure to pass here. We couldn’t have a better place. They haven’t started yet from the barracks, for we’d hear the band.”

As he spoke the sound of a drum came booming towards them, and the strains of “Auld Lang Syne” struck up faintly in the distance.

“There !” said Tom ; “they’re just starting now. They won’t be here for another fifteen minutes or so.”

It was a trying nervous quarter of an hour that for many of the little party gathered together at the cross roads ; and as the sad farewell strains fell on their listening ears, the tears trickled down the faces of the female portion of the Trevor family, whilst old Trevor himself wiped his glasses nervously, and kept

coughing and striking his chest, and remarking that he was afraid that the morning air was giving him cold.

May, too, was fearfully depressed ; she had a sort of feeling about her that she had somehow wronged little Kitty Trevor, and she felt then that if she could only have had a second heart, it would have been all his. As to that little goose Fanny Trevor, who always wore her heart on her sleeve, she looked as if she were going to burst out crying every moment, and received several sharp kicks under the rug from Carry, just by way of keeping her up to the mark.

Nearer and nearer came the sound of music, and then it stopped abruptly, and a hoarse cheer rose to the heavens.

"Why are they cheering?" asked Kate Chichester.

"Because they're English," replied Tom ; "and it's an English way of celebrating anything of importance."

As the cheer died away, there was a roll of small drums, and then the morning air was filled with the sound of the fifers piping out on behalf of themselves and their comrades,

their shrill farewell to the "girls they left behind them."

"Isn't it beautiful?" whispered Fanny to Carry.

"No!" snappishly replied Carry, who was afraid that if she showed the slightest indulgence to her'sister, there would be a break-down. "It's hideous."

A few more minutes and the body of men wound round a corner like a huge serpent, and appeared in view, some way up the road.

On they came, feet moving, arms swinging, and even the bright accoutrements glancing in time to the shrill notes. Then, just before the head of the column arrived opposite, there was another long roll from the drums, the fifes stopped, and the band in full and mellow tones, broke out again into "Auld Lang Syne."

The old Colonel who had grown gray in the service, and on whose breast glittered many a medal and order, had dismounted, and stalked, tall and erect, at the head of his men.

As he passed, he waved a farewell to the group in a cheery off-hand manner, and

strode on. To him, going to Gibraltar was not much more than making an afternoon call.

Then passed several officers, some of whom bowed, and all of whom looked hard at the group, as being the last thoroughly English picture they might see for some time ; but no Kitty. Then came the colours, to which Tom reverently doffed his billy-cock. And then there was a sudden craning forward of necks in the wagonette at an approaching boyish figure. It was Kitty coming along with his company.

They were "marching at ease," so he stopped for a moment at the wagonette, and tore off his white buckskin glove for a last shake of the hand all round.

"God bless you, my dear boy !" said his father in a husky voice.

"Good-bye, Kit ! good-bye, Kit !" shrilly squeaked the string of little brothers and sisters, trying hard not to cry.

"God bless you, my darling !" murmured his mother with bursting heart, and quivering lips.

May was the last he shook hands with, and

as her small hand rested in his, and his upturned glance met hers for an instant, the march changed from "Auld Lang Syne" to "Good-bye, Sweetheart, Good-bye!" And to the very appropriate air Kitty marched on, and was soon lost in the crowd of red coats.

On they went, swinging past, but where was Brunton? He was nowhere to be seen. Where was he? It was a question that had been asked a great many times that morning by several men, who had been hanging about suspiciously, while the regiment was falling in, and had not only employed themselves in inquiries, but had prowled about, prying and looking everywhere for him, but without any success.

Could he have carried that drum scheme into effect? No, the big drummer had gone past in much too erect and stately a manner, for an individual so weighted.

It was evident he was not there. At all events, he was not to be seen anywhere. But, somehow, as the last company passed the wagonette, Fanny Trevor gave a start, turned deadly pale, flushed scarlet, then turned pale again, and finally "boohood"

outright ; regardless of a fearful shinning under the rug from her sister. At all this, a smart-looking young private—

“What was Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba?”

what could it have been to him?—turned very red, and looked much concerned, so much so that he had to blow his nose, and, in doing so, detached from his upper-lip a large moustache, which he immediately re-adjusted with much trepidation.

A few more moments, and the whole regiment had passed, leaving nothing behind them but dust, music, and “the girls.” There was now nothing to do, but to drive home with the consciousness of a long weary day before them.

“If you don’t leave off crying, Fanny,” whispered Carry Trevor, “I declare I’ll pinch you.”

“Very well, I won’t cry, Carry, dear,” whispered poor little Fanny. “But oh, dear! He must have done something very dreadful to have been degraded to a common soldier; and oh, oh! perhaps he’ll be shot.”

“What *are* you talking about, you little

goose ?” said Carry, who must not be thought unkind. It was only her manner of keeping her tender-hearted little sister up to the mark.

“Oh, nothing, nothing !” replied Fanny, locking up in her foolish little bosom some dreadful secret that had, somehow, suddenly found its way there.

They had breakfast soon after they all got to Lissington, more for something to do than for the sake of eating, and afterwards they went out on to the lawn, where they could hear, every now and again, a strain of distant music, borne faintly to them on the morning breeze.

In the meantime, the huge red serpent, glittering and flashing in the rays of the sun, went on winding along the dusty roads and between the green hedges ; arousing the quiet country with its clanging and braying ; bringing children tumbling out of schools ; old folks hobbling out of their cottages ; servant-maids rushing to garden-gates ; and reapers away from their work to the roadside hedge, all bent on one object, staring and gaping, and wondering what it was all about.

On it went, trumpeting and drumming ; awaking admiration in the young women ; military aspiration in the young men ; vague ideas, and fears of invasion in the old women ; and affording an excuse to the old men to go to the ale-house, and have a " pot," and talk over the time when they expected a visit from the great Napoleon.

After two hours of this a halt was called, and the great serpent went to pieces in the most wonderful manner. Then the men took off their " packs," and threw themselves down on the roadside, and the country folks came and mixed timidly with them, and talked to them as if they were a different order of beings altogether ; while some gentlemen, out part-ridge shooting, came striding over the turnips and joined the group of officers.

Then a bugle sounds, and the serpent knits itself together in a few seconds, and winds on again as before, while the sun darts fiercely down on the heavily-laden forms, strapped and braced up as tightly as leather and buttons can do it. On they go, though, but not quite so jauntily now, and, somewhere about the tail, the great serpent

begins to look somewhat disjointed. But still they trudge on, until the Colonel sees how distressed they are going, and another halt is made.

Then the men take off their knapsacks with curses on them, and throw themselves down under the hedges, in the ditches—anywhere, panting and jaded, and many a one of them remarks, as he loosens the galling straps and buckles, that he feels a “bit queer about ’ere,” placing his hand over his heart, which is thumping at his ribs, as if it felt confined and cramped where it was, and was knocking and clamouring for more room.

“I’d give a month’s pay for a pot o’ four ale now,” says a man, wiping his brow with his sleeve, and looking disconsolately into the inside of his stiff shako, out of which nothing was to be obtained but a splitting headache, and that he had already got.

“And so’d I,” says another, with a languishing sigh; and the wishes and desires of all seem to take that one homely shape, a “pot o’ four ale;” while the officers confess to an equal longing for liquid in some form.

No wonder they were all thirsty, poor fel-

lows! The heat was stifling, and the dust, churned and kicked up by sixteen hundred feet, enveloped them, as they marched along, in a dense cloud, which choked and blinded them. As to those in rear, they breathed an atmosphere of nothing but grit.

Some cottagers came out with a few cups, and two or three cans of water; but what were they among so many? Besides, a cup full of water, even to the few who were lucky enough to get it, had about as much effect on their parched throats, as a drop of water has on a red-hot piece of iron. There was a fizz, a cool spot for a moment, and then all was as dry and as hot again as ever.

As to the officers, they had not even *this* crumb of comfort, for *noblesse oblige* is the principle of their order, whether it be hunger and thirst, or shot and shell, that are to be braved.

The yearnings for malt liquor, and the sighs after seltzer and sherry, and other drinkables, were at their height, when a cheery "w-whoop" fell on their ears.

All eyes were turned in the direction from which the enlivening sound proceeded, and

there was a general inquiry of "Who is it?" as a drag, looming through a cloud of dust, was seen rapidly approaching up a cross road.

"It's Tom Bullekeley, I *do* believe!" said Kit Trevor, as the "w-whoop" was repeated.

Kit was right. In a few moments, the leaders cantered smartly round the corner, and Tom drew up on the roadside.

"I thought I should cut you off about here," he said, jumping down off the box into the centre of the group of officers who clustered round. "What a piping hot day it's turned out! I knew there wasn't a public along this road for miles, Colonel, or if there was, that eight hundred men would drink it dry in about two minutes, and that you'd all be pretty well baked, so I've brought you some liquor."

While Tom was speaking, the butler, and two servants whom he had brought from Lissington, jumped off the drag, and clearing away for action with wondrous dexterity, displayed to the enraptured gaze of the beholders, inexhaustible treasures of seltzer-

water, sherry, cognac, soda-water, lemonade, blocks of ice, beer, &c.

“ There, Colonel, try that !” said Tom, as the butler handed a foaming glass of sherry and seltzer, with a lump of ice bobbing about refreshingly on the surface, and making most delicious tinkling music against the rim.

The old chief looked at it, and though there was feverish longing in the gaze, and his very nose seemed to curl with rapture, he hesitated, and glanced at the soldiers.

“ All right, Co'onel ! I've lots of beer for the men,” said Tom.

There was no hesitation *now*. The nervous hand grasped the glass, and, after two or three blissful seconds, it was handed back with a sigh of relief, and a heartfelt “ Thank you, my dear fellow !”

Tom was now hard at work, cutting wire, drawing corks, chipping off lumps of ice from huge blocks swathed in flannel like gouty invalids, and seeing after the beer for the men. There was no lack of this beverage. There was a barrel on the top of the drag; there was another inside ; and there, in the distance, was old Walters, coming up in a

tax-cart with another barrel, of such magnificent proportions that it took up the whole of the inside of the cart, and obliged him to sit straddle-legged on the top, like a jolly old Bacchus.

A cheer burst from the men as this thrilling spectacle met their gaze, and before it had subsided old Walters was in their midst, having jumped down with an agility that one would as soon have expected to see in the cask he had bestriden, and set to work, without a moment's loss of time, about such delightful preparations as getting a numerous array of pewter pots in readiness, and loosening the vent-peg.

"My heye, Billy! we was wishin' for 'fourpenny,' and this 'ere's heighthpenny, at the werry least!" remarked a soldier, as he gently rubbed the spot under which a pint of the extolled liquid had just been placed, with an ease and dexterity only acquired by constant practice.

"Billy" did not answer at the moment, but he looked expressively over the rim of a tilted pewter pot, and held out his disengaged hand, as an appeal to his friend not to

break in upon those delicious moments by idle conversation.

Tom and his assistants bustled about with such will—the butler not only forgetting his jealousy of Walters, but even co-operating cordially with him—that in a very short time there was not a single parched throat in the whole assemblage. There was no time now to be lost, and the bugle once more rung out the “fall in.”

As Tom was standing with a glass of iced soda and brandy in his hand, as a stirrup-cup for any officer who chose to stop, as they hurried off to their companies, his eye fell on a young private, lingering near the spot, and gazing wistfully at it.

“Come here, my man!” said Tom. “This won’t do you any harm, I dare say.”

The young private, who was the same one who had turned so red as he passed the wagonette, advanced briskly, and, as he lifted the glass to his lips, winked familiarly. Tom first looked astonished, then burst into a laugh, which was immediately checked by a motion of the young private’s head towards a couple of men in a gig, who passed at the

moment, scanning every one and everything narrowly as they drove slowly along.

"Thankee, zur, koindly!" said the private, in a strong Somersetshire dialect, as he saluted, and walked off to his place in the ranks.

The regiment was just going to march, when old Walters rushed up to Kitty Trevor, and handed him something, wrapped up in a piece of note paper.

"Beg pardon, Master Trevor, Miss May sent you this. Good-bye, God bless you, sir!"

Kitty took the little parcel, and opened it; while the blood rushed to his face.

It contained a pale, delicately-tinted rose, and a sprig of maiden-hair fern tied together with—a piece of string? No. A thread? No—a *single golden hair*. On the paper was written, "The name of this rose is '*Souvenir d'un ami*.'" The "*Souvenir*" was underlined; the "*ami*" doubly so.

Kitty placed the precious little keepsake in the bosom of his tunic, and said to Walters,

"Tell Miss May that—"

"Bang!" went the sentiment-dispelling big-drum, and Kitty marched off to its sound.

Tom here mounted the box of his drag, and waited to see them all go by.

As each company swung past him, jauntily and gaily now, it gave him a ringing cheer, and there arose many a cry from the ranks of "Long life to you, sir!" "You've given us a pair of new legs each, sir!" "God bless you, Cap'en!" and many other similar compliments, which Tom acknowledged with cheery nods and his bright smile.

There is no doubt of it that one of the quickest and surest *routes* to a man's heart is down his throat, particularly if that throat be parched and dry.

At all events, it was in this case. Tom had gone down about eight hundred throats, been at once admitted into eight hundred hearts, which, overflowing with gratitude, set eight hundred tongues wagging in his praise for many and many a mile as the men trudged on through the dust, discussing in homely but emphatic barrack-room style the kindly act.

For days the great glittering noisy serpent went on winding through the country, splitting itself up into little atoms whenever it came to

a town in the evening, and re-uniting itself in the morning, and going on again in the same systematic way.

Through London it went, winding along the narrow streets and crowded thoroughfares, and twisting in and out amongst the vehicles. Past the public-houses, awakening the wrath and indignation of the owners, by the spectacle of so many thirsty souls passing their portals without any more substantial notice than longing looks, and educing from these philanthropic and purely disinterested publicans, many virtuous denunciations of the whole proceeding, as highly injurious to the men and unfair to the trade ; the latter, of course, being merely a secondary consideration.

Past the military clubs, provoking professional criticism, and sending off several red-faced and choleric old gentlemen from the windows to the writing-room, to tell the general public, through the *Times* and the military papers, that "soldiers now-a-days were not what soldiers used to be in theirs," when "marching, by gad ! used to be *marching*, and not *slouching* and *straggling* !"

Through the parks, where the men were allowed to take off their "packs," and lie under the grateful shade of the magnificent old trees. Past the barracks at Chelsea, where the men of the Guards turned out and gave them a cheer. Then out on the other side of the great overgrown city, amongst the green fields and farm-houses once more.

Through all these changes of scene, the men we first noticed in the gig kept turning up all along the *route* in traps hired from the nearest towns; sometimes driving past the regiment, looking at all the faces as they went along, regardless of the chaff and jeers hurled at them from the ranks; then waiting for it, and letting it pass them, and then sometimes hanging on its rear, but always there, or thereabouts.

Sometimes they attempted to enter into conversation with the men when a halt was called, and they were lying and standing about in chatting groups, but these overtures were always met with very plain-spoken rebuffs, as their errand was as unpopular with the soldiers as the individual whom it particularly affected was the reverse.

Still, not the least discouraged or disconcerted, they continued to hang about ; sometimes in rear, sometimes in front, and sometimes alongside the regiment, like a couple of sharks following a ship.

Has the reader ever had the opportunity of observing one of these monsters of the deep following a ship for days, on the lookout for anything, or any one, dropping overboard ? Sometimes waiting a long way astern, then coming up with a spurt close alongside, and looking up with its cunning green eyes at you, as much as to say, " Won't anybody be kind enough to fall overboard, to oblige a poor old fish ? Just room for one inside, and no objection to a fat 'un ;" then darting down with a whisk of his tail into the depths, and coming up again, just by way of adding, " You see it's all play. Come along, and have a friendly game with me."

Did you ever catch a shark's eye fixed upon you, reader ? If you have, you know what a horrid feeling comes over you at the moment. If you have not, then let us tell you it sends a shiver to the very marrow, and imagination

produces in the limbs a momentary sensation of being crunched.

Whenever these land sharks, then, happened to fix their cold searching eyes on the young private with the large moustache, he felt very uncomfortable ; but he was a good actor, and did not show what he felt, and the gimlet eyes, after transfixing him for a few moments, would always turn away without any dreaded gleam of recognition coming into them.

This young private's behaviour was altogether curious and unaccountable, particularly so when the regiment was halted, for at these times he appeared, from some cause or another, to belong to no one. Of course he could not mix with the officers, who always collected together in a group ; and somehow the soldiers seemed to get away from him, and sheer off respectfully whenever he approached.

This isolation invited scrutiny, which the young man was evidently desirous of avoiding, for once when the myrmidons of the law were prowling about, he addressed a passing

private with a rather authoritative "Johnson!"

"Yes, sir," replied the man, instinctively raising his hand as if to salute.

"For heaven's sake, keep your hand down, and come here!" said the mysterious young soldier.

Johnson obeyed.

"Now, Johnson, clap me familiarly on the shoulder!"

"Yes, sir," said the man, obeying the direction with a heavy hand and a heavier manner.

"Now, Johnson, burst into a loud laugh in my face, and call me 'Tommy!'"

This mandate was obeyed, "Tommy" joining in the laugh, as if some barrack-room joke were being relished.

"There, thank you, Johnson! That will do. Confound it! Can't you keep your hand down?" said this extraordinary young private, and then, as the danger was passed, he muttered, "I rather think *that* quieted any suspicions."

Another time he took refuge from prying impertinence in a roadside cottage, under the

pretence of asking a cup of water from an old man and old woman, its only occupants, apparently.

His appearance here was the signal for the outburst of much senile garrulity. To the old man the sight of the red coat recalled the recollections of the time when the news of the battle of Waterloo set all England ringing bells, lighting bonfires, roasting whole oxen, and broaching barrels of ale. The only reminiscences of the great event, however, which he had preserved, were these gastronomic rejoicings which followed it. It was impossible to get his mind off this one groove, for although the young soldier made many attempts at drawing him out on the subject, he could never elicit anything more than "Waterloo! Ay, well I mind it — had a jolly good blow out, I had!" On him it had not made an impression as the deliverance of Europe, or as a glorious victory achieved principally by his countrymen, but merely an occasion on which he had had a "jolly good blow out!"

To the old woman, the appearance of their

martial guest suggested "wars and rumours of wars."

"And have you been fightin' many battles lately?" she asked, under a sort of idea that the regiment was marching about on the look out for a fight.

The young private replied carelessly,

"Well, no ; not within the last three weeks or so ; but"—and here he changed his demeanour, and fixed an imaginary enemy with a blood-thirsty glare—"we'll be at 'em again in about a fortnight !"

This had such an effect on the old couple, that the old man began at once to speculate on the chances of another victory, leading to another "jolly good blow out," and the old woman retired with emotion behind her apron to sniff and mutter, "Them French, oh, them French!" And then carried away by her admiration for such heroism, she hurried into the back premises, whence she shortly returned, bearing a cup of butter-milk as a reward for valour.

The young man repented heartily of the utterance of the warlike and patriotic sentiments which had borne such fruit ; but not

liking to refuse the old woman, he took the cup, drank off its contents like a dose of medicine, and after looking out of the door to see if the coast were clear, bade the old couple a hearty farewell, and hurried off to take a "nip" of something from a small silver flask which he produced from his pocket.

Two days after this, the regiment arrived at Portsmouth, and embarked on board Her Majesty's troop-ship "Bandbox," in which it was to go to Gibraltar, or to the bottom, according to circumstances. The "Bandbox" herself rather inclined to the *latter* destination.

Up to the last moment before her departure, the two men who had hung on to the regiment all along the *route*, and still stuck to it, continued their search, prowling about the decks, peeping into the saloon, and peering down companions, until their labours were brought to a close by a boatswain's mate handing them over the side.

As they stepped into their boat, and the ladder of the transport was drawn up, cutting off all further communication with Old Eng-

land, the eccentric young private rushed down to an officer's cabin, and re-appeared in a few moments *in propria personâ*. It was Reggy Brunton, of course.

The screw went round. The ship's head turned slowly seawards, and Reggy Brunton, jumping upon the taffrail, thus addressed the two men who were bobbing about in their boat, in the troubled waters astern :

“ Farewell, a long farewell, to all my creditors ! Tell them my last thoughts were of them, and bid them not to be anxious about me. The climate of Gibraltar is salubrious, and I daresay I shall enjoy excellent health. Tell my tailor not to mourn for me ! Bid my shoemaker not weep ! Give my love to that accommodating Hebrew, Mr. Mossom ; I see I am indebted to him the trifling sum of about fifteen hundred pounds, just three *monkeys*, and as the rock of Gibraltar abounds with those animals, I daresay I shall be able to forward him a few lively young specimens. Farewell, my friends ! Take care of yourselves, for *my* sake ! Bless you ! Bless you ! ”

Reggy jumped down, and whatever reply the men may have made was drowned by the band striking up, for the last time, "Auld Lang Syne."

CHAPTER X.

CRUEL AS THE GRAVE.

"Sick, am I sick of a jealous dread?"—*Tennyson.*



OW Fane Vereker, as a bachelor, used to laugh at jealousy. But how little did he think then, as he jeered at it in others, that he himself should ever be subject to anything so contemptible and foolish !

In those days, the torments he was causing a jealous husband gave him as little concern as the agonies of a bird, laid low by his gun, did, and was as likely to stop him in his course as a fish wriggling on a hook is likely to deter an angler from fishing, or a blue rock, fluttering to the ground in its agony, a member of the gun-club from shooting.

But now it was mightily different when *he* was married !

It could not have been a more complete turning of the tables if the fish at the end of the line, and the angler at the end of the rod, had changed ends ; or the pigeon clapped the Hurlingham hero into a trap, and requested him to hop out and be shot at twenty-five yards' rise.

Yes ! He was now wriggling on the hook on which he had impaled so many wretches. With this difference though : there was no one holding the rod and playing him. He was simply writhing on the tenter-hooks of his own imagination. It was the foreboding, the dread, of what *might* happen, not what *was* happening that tormented him. It was his own guilty experiences recoiling on his head.

It was like the hangman who used to enjoy the struggles of his victims, and think hanging a capital joke, until, one day, it came to his own turn to be operated upon, when he set up a piteous plea that the punishment was a thousandfold worse for him than for a non-professional, because *he* knew so much about

it that he died a thousand deaths in anticipation.

It was also like the physician whose professional knowledge is so often destructive to his peace of mind, in awakening fears and misgivings for his own health. It is proverbial that he is more nervous and fanciful about himself than most men ; and he is so, for the reason that he *knows* too much. If there is the slightest click, or least hitch in his mechanism, he can not only give the "airy nothing a local habitation and a name," but his imagination and his knowledge, acting and re-acting on each other, supply all the necessary symptoms ; until he is able to form a very respectable complaint out of nothing. A twinge in the right side—and he is soon able to make out a very fair liver-case against himself. A shoot in the chest—and he gives the airy nothing a local habitation in his lungs, and the name *pneumonia* ; and out of a piece of undigested cucumber he can make out a fine choleraic case.

After this manner did Fane Vereker torture himself. *He knew too much*, also. He knew how he had weaned away the love of many a

woman from her husband, and this damned knowledge bore bitter fruit in the shape of a sickening dread lest men should do unto him as he had done unto them.

"Give him time and opportunity," and Fane Vereker had been wont to say that he would back himself to win *any* woman's love ; and damnable as was the boast, in *his* case it had hardly been an empty one.

From his own experience and success in this vile career, he had founded a belief that there was no such thing as immaculate virtue under the sun. This belief he once thought he would have lived and died in, but somehow it was silenced when *he really* loved, and became a married man. It was not long, though, before the recollection of this cursed creed broke out, and the maddening question was for ever before him, "Why should your case be the only exception to your old belief?"

Yes, there are no men so keenly susceptible to the fierce thrusts and darts of jealousy, as those who have inflicted them most on others. Their skin is so thin that the slightest scratch draws blood.

If revenge be sweet, which is very doubtful, but if it be, how immeasurably sweet would it have been to women whom he had betrayed, and men whom he had wronged, if they could have had a peep into Fane Vereker's heart, torn and lacerated by doubts and fears.

And yet he had no cause for jealousy. Not a single word or act of Blanche Vereker was there that could, in reality, have served as a peg to hang a doubt or suspicion upon.

"But jealous souls will not be answered so,
They are not ever jealous of the cause,
But jealous for they are jealous: 'tis a monster
Begot upon itself, born on itself."

Such a self-begotten monster was it that fixed its claws deep into Fane's heart, and fed on it night and day.

He could not have said of whom he was jealous. It was any one, every one. It was any living thing in male attire that she ever bowed to, smiled upon, or spoke with.

He was jealous of that uninteresting youth, Cornet Molter, when he took off his hat to her, and a fearful suspicion flashed through his brain because that same vapid piece of

humanity stuttered when it spoke to her one day.

He was even jealous of Gwyn, though he knew his sentiments, and thought he detected a covert smile playing on his lips whenever Blanche's name was mentioned.

He was jealous of Tom, but only as he was jealous of every handsome man. In short, his mind was in a perpetual state of antagonism towards every male of his or her acquaintance.

Aha! How do you like it now, Fane Vereker? Are women only "playthings, to be chucked on one side when done with, and not to go breaking your heart about?" Is a man a "d—d fool to go and make himself miserable because his wife has a weakness for another fellow," eh?

That's what you used to say once, you know. But it is different now, isn't it?

Yes, the game is altered. It used to be all fun for you, and death to your opponents. But now, it's your turn to field out, and let others have their innings.

Such was the difference between Fane Vereker, the handsome, irresistible libertine,

and Fane Vereker married and done for ; and such is the way in which many a heartless, unscrupulous *roué* at last meets with his deserts, and is broken upon the wheel himself.

A woman, if she love a man, does not mind his jealousy, but rather likes to see it, as, though it may be a little inconvenient at times, it is, nevertheless, a guarantee that the flame of his love is still burning brightly and with undiminished ardour. But if she be indifferent to him, then it becomes unbearable, and, instead of being an incentive to her love, is a most effectual extinguisher of even the little spark that may yet be smouldering.

Blanche Vereker, at times, could not help feeling wearied of her husband's jealousy, although she never showed it. She knew she never, in word or deed, gave him the slightest occasion for it ; and this consciousness made it doubly hard for her to bear all the whims and crotchets of his jealous brain.

Some women, under the circumstances, might have, at last, been tempted, or goaded into trying a homœopathic cure for the disease, such as giving him a small dose of something to be really jealous about. But

not so Blanche Vereker. She never dreamed of such an expedient as embarking in a mild flirtation. She had too much self-respect, and even if that had not restrained her, a strong sense of her duty towards her husband would have done so. There had lately been a bitter awakening to the mistake she now felt she had made in marrying him. Her regrets were not selfish ones. She felt for him as much as she did for herself. She certainly had *always* known that she had no real love for him, but as long as she had thought it was as much as she was capable of, she had felt no repinings for her own lot, or no reproaches of conscience for having, in a way, wronged him. But lately something within her had told her that she was capable of a very different love—a love that could make the tones of the loved one's voice thrill the very soul—a love that could absorb every thought, every idea into one feeling of adoration—a love that could make his presence like the bright, genial sunshine, his absence like the black cheerless night. Yes, she now knew that she was capable of feeling such love as *this*; for (and "Oh, Heaven help me!" had been her

cry when she first made the discovery) she *had begun* to feel it. The scales had fallen from her eyes, and she saw that what had been, at first, merely warm friendship and girlish admiration for Tom Bullekeley, and what she had blindly continued to look upon as such, had been, all this time, in reality, ripening into this love. She had dashed the cup from her lips with shuddering horror directly she saw the deadly poison lurking in it; and ever since the discovery, her constant thought and effort had been to root out the disease, and make amends to her husband for withholding all this love she could not give him.

She had never realised before what his love was; but, now, she could form an idea of it; and a gentle pity took the place of her former indifference. It sent a pang to her generous heart to note how even her careless glance at a man sent the blood from his cheeks, or set him biting his lips; and then, to think "How, if he could know the fearful secret she had discovered?"

When we described Fane Vereker as the most jealous of mortals, we never meant to

hint for a moment that he belonged to the poker and carving-knife school of jealous husbands. There was never a violent, or even unkind, word spoken. But to Blanche, now that this new-born pity had crept into her heart, the pained look, the quivering of the lip, and the bloodless cheek, were inexpressibly more touching. She had grown lately, with all this wear and tear of mind, paler and more delicate-looking, and this, if possible, increased Fane's love and devotion.

One day, when he was on parade, and she sat by herself, her mind oscillating between vain longings for the past to be undone, and noble resolves for the future, she thus laid down her line of conduct :—

“ Yes, she would strain every nerve to do her duty faithfully by her husband in word, thought, and deed. If she could not love him, she could still honour and obey him; and these she would strive to do in every little way, no matter how difficult the task.”

Then, unconsciously, she gave way to a fit of repining.

“ What a fool I was,” she murmured bitterly, “ to think that I was different from all

other women, and that I could never love! And oh! how contemptible in me to tie myself to a man I did not love, to become part of him, to merge my existence into his. Oh! it was despicable of me! Why didn't mamma—why didn't my brother—why didn't Fane *himself* stop it? *He* knew—no one better, for no one has tried it more—what woman's love is; and he must have seen I didn't really care for him, for I never pretended to love him. How could he have had so little pride as to take me like that? Yes, it was *his* fault! Oh! what am I saying? Poor Fane! It's *I* that wronged *him*! There is no one to blame but myself. It was my *own* doing, my own fault, and mine must be the atonement!"

She uttered a short little prayer for strength, and then went on.

"I must never allow myself to forget for a single instant that I belong to Fane, that I'm his alone. I'll not spare myself. I'll understand thoroughly, and acknowledge my position as his wife, and impress it upon myself. Let me see exactly what I promised him, poor fellow!"

She took from a table close at hand a diminutive ivory-bound Prayer-book, one of those pretty little knickknacks ladies hold daintily in their well-gloved hands in church. Turning over the tiny leaves, and scanning the microscopic letters, until she came to the marriage ceremony, she began to read earnestly. And as she read on, she frequently looked up with flushed cheeks to utter such exclamations as—"Oh! how *could* I swear all this!"—"I never read it through before."—"I did not know it was so solemn and impressive. If I had, I'm sure I should never have married Fane."—"God forgive me! I'm afraid when I was kneeling on those steps, if I was thinking of anything, it was more likely to have been whether my train was hanging properly behind, than of the words I was repeating like a parrot."

"There!" she said, as she shut the little book up with a gentle and reverent snap; "at all events, I fully realise now the consequences of my own act. There's Fane! I hope he won't notice that my eyes look red."

This last remark was occasioned by the sound of a horse's hoofs on the drive, then

there was a jingling of spurs on the stairs, and in another moment "Captain Bullekeley" was announced.

"How do you do, Blanche?" said Tom, advancing, and looking, in his tightly-fitting stable-jacket, a very model for light cavalry. "I suppose the Colonel must have just come in. In fact, I half expected to catch him up on the road, for I left barracks only a few minutes after he did—so the sentry on the gate told me."

"No, he's not in," replied Blanche Vereker, with—do what she could—a slight tremulousness in her voice, and a blush on her cheeks, which, together, would have flattered the vanity of any Captain in the service but Tom Bullekeley, who, however, noticed nothing of the sort, and went on.

"I was rather anxious to catch him, as I've suddenly recollected there's a sale this afternoon, and to-morrow, at Tattersall's I wish to attend, and I wanted to get a couple of days' leave to run up to town. Do you think he'll be long?"

Blanche was sure he would not, and asked Tom to be seated, a piece of politeness she

had only just recovered her presence of mind sufficiently to perform.

Tom sat down, and engaged in small talk, during which he took up the tiny Prayer-book and began playing with it.

"Yes, we all drove to the cross roads, near Lissington, and saw them pass. Poor little Kitty Trevor looked quite cut up. I would hardly have believed it of him."

"I would, though," said Blanche.

"Why?"

"Why, because I think he was leaving his heart behind him, and I should say that was always a painful proceeding. I believe he's desperately in love with May."

"Well," said Tom, laughingly, "I believe Master Kitty *has* a weakness that way; but the dark eyes of the Spanish girls will soon—Hulloa! By Jove! it's a Prayer-book! Didn't know they made them so small. Took it for an ivory letter-weight, or something of that sort. It keeps opening persistently at the marriage ceremony, too. Now, if I were superstitious, Blanche, I should fancy something dreadful in that way was going to happen to me."

"Should you really think it very dreadful, then? I hope you're not a convert to your friend Captain Gwyn's views of women."

"Well, to tell the truth, I have not given the matter much consideration. Let's see what it looks like," said Tom, glancing at the pages before him. "It's a much longer business than I thought. Never read it before."

"How strange!" thought Blanche, "that he and I should have read those same words for the first time, in both our lives, within a few minutes of each other, and out of the *same* book. What an extraordinary coincidence!"

Tom soon had enough of the subject, and, dismissing it with, "Oh, this isn't in *my* line!" broke into one more congenial to his tastes, namely, anticipations of the coming winter's sport. He never obtruded his sport on people who did not care for or understand it. He was quite capable of entering into and enjoying conversation totally innocent of the stable, and did not, like Captain Featherstoneheehaw, look upon horses and riding as the only subjects in the world worth talking about. But when he did get with an appre-

ciative spirit, he launched out freely into such topics. He knew Blanche Vereker of old, how fond she had been of listening to his boyish accounts of the wondrous feats he and his ponies used to perform; and so he rattled on in much the same careless way as he had been wont to do then. But Blanche, somehow, did not enter into the subject with the same old zest; on the contrary, she seemed *distract*, and was far from evincing that heartiness of manner which was naturally hers, and which ought to have been extended to so old a friend. The truth was, she did not like even to listen to him, or to meet his glance now. There was danger in the tones of his voice, and in his honest eyes; and she disliked being alone with him. How she *did* wish, either that Fane would come in, or Tom would go!

"Do you know, Blanche," said Tom, stopping short in his subject, "I've noticed lately you've been looking very pale, and been out of sorts. I shall report the whole thing to the Colonel."

"Please don't," said Blanche, with a strange, fluttering manner. "Poor Fane!

He's quite enough unnecessarily concerned about me, without any more ideas being put into his head. I certainly, though, don't feel as strong as I used to," she added ; and, in spite of herself, her voice *would* tremble, and the tears *would* come into her eyes. "How foolish I am! Thank Heaven! here's Fane at last!" she thought, as she heard him approaching on horseback.

As Fane entered, he looked pale and worried. He had noticed Tom's horse being led about, betraying unmistakable symptoms of having been ridden fast from barracks, where, he knew, he had left Tom Bullekeley. "What the devil can he want? coming over in such a hurry, as if just to nick off my absence!" flashed through his suspicious mind. The whole thing brought back, so vividly, some of his own experiences of stolen moments, snatched almost from under the very noses of unsuspecting husbands, that in a moment a whole train of jealous thoughts was fired.

"Well, Bullekeley! I thought I left you in barracks?"

"So you did, Colonel," replied Tom ;

“but I got here, somehow, before you—distanced you, in fact.”

Fane's jealousy was momentarily allayed by Tom's hearty, open manner; but then he recollected how often *he* had put the green-eyed monster to flight by the same means, and *that* consolation vanished.

Oh, damned guilty knowledge! that could meet, and drive back faith and trust at every point, and turn every innocent action into a crime, every trifle into an intrigue!

“Well, and what can I do for you?” he asked.

Tom soon told his errand.

“All right! certainly,” replied Fane Vereker, “but you need not have given yourself the trouble of coming all this way, my dear fellow, a line would have done.”

“Well, you see, Colonel, time was an object, and I half expected to catch you up before you had got half way, for the sentry said you had only just gone, and I shoved my ‘gee’ along the whole way here.”

“I went round by Hawley,” said Fane Vereker. “You'll stop and have some lunch, won't you?”

"No, thanks; I'll only just have time to get back to barracks, change, and catch the train. Good-bye, Blanche! Good-bye, Colonel!" and away went Tom, as bright as a school-boy with three whole holidays before him.

Fane accompanied him out of the room, and Blanche, from the window, saw Tom canter down the drive on Frailty, who tossed her head, and bounded along, as if beside herself with pride at having one of the best gentlemen riders of England on her back.

Blanche watched for a few moments, and then, as if recollecting all her good resolutions, turned sharply away from the window, muttering to herself, "No, I won't look at him—I feel that it's wrong for me even to do *that!*"

"Are you ill, Fane?" she asked, as her husband re-entered; "you look quite pale and haggard."

"No, Blanche," he said: "not in the least ill—I feel quite well." His face, however, gave the lie to his words.

"I'm sure something has put you out, what

is it?" she asked with real pity, for he looked unquestionably ill and wretched.

"Nothing at all, nothing but—Look here, Blanche, I request you never to receive gentlemen visitors in my absence, no matter *who* they are."

"Very well. Of course, I shall do as you wish, but do you mean to say, Fane, that you can't trust your wife to be alone for a few moments in the society of a gentleman, and a thorough gentleman, too, like Tom Bullekeley?"

"I'd trust my wife," replied Fane, as he looked into Blanche's blue eyes fixed honestly on him, "but"—and here he thought of what he himself had been—"I won't trust any man living. Tell me everything Bullekeley said!"

Blanche looked scornfully, and was too proud to make a reply.

Her silence went to Fane Vereker's heart like a dagger, and his cheeks grew paler, if possible, and his lips trembled.

She pitied him, and spoke.

"Look here, Fane! It's degrading me to make me answer such a question; but I'll do so—I give you my sacred solemn word

that there was not a look, a gesture, a tone, or a word, that came from Captain Bullekeley, the whole time he was here, that you, my husband, might not have seen or heard."

Here Blanche broke down, and, woman-like, had recourse to tears. It was galling to her to be suspected when she knew she was straining her whole soul to crush even a thought untrue to him.

"No, Fane! You wrong *me*; you wrong *yourself*; and you wrong Tom Bullekeley, by such notions!" She looked up, and, through her tears, saw him standing before her like a culprit. He looked years older in the last ten minutes. She pitied him, and felt, at that moment, as if she would have given anything to be able to return his love.


"Forgive me, darling!" he said, straining her to his breast and kissing her. "It all arises out of my love for you. If it were less, I would not dread losing yours so much, and if I did not dread so much, I should never think of such things; but I won't do it again, darling, I promise you."

Fane Vereker's "won't do it again," was

very much like a naughty boy's "won't do it again, until next time." He could not help it. It was a disease that men of his stamp are peculiarly susceptible to.

CHAPTER XI.

IMMEDIATE AND PRESSING.

F money cannot purchase happiness, still it can purchase materials for making up an article sufficiently resembling it for all practical purposes.

Even Leonard Helstone, and he was anything but an optimist, admitted, in his journal, that money was conducive to happiness.

Of course it is. No one ever said it was not, except in a sermon, or a copy-book.

We do not say that it *always* brings happiness to its possessor. There are very many people who are very wealthy but very miserable. But if a man is miserable with riches, it's his nature, and he'll be much more so without.

No, money cannot *always* purchase happiness; but there are times when it—and nothing else—most unquestionably can, and the times when it cannot are the exception to the general rule.

Do you doubt this? Well, ask the poor shivering outcast, who has a wife and family starving at home—if that sweet, sacred name can be applied to a damp cellar, or a filthy garret—if money would not make *him* happy? Would not it clothe and feed him and his? Would it not transform that den of want and misery into something like a home? Would it not give his children education, and take them from that path along which want and necessity are driving them to dishonesty, to gaol, perhaps to the gallows? Would it not save him from drink, which the contemplation of this misery is driving him to? Would not money do all this? And would not all this make the poor forlorn wretch happy? Poverty, and nothing else, is *his* complaint. Poverty is what is the matter with *him*, and money can cure *that*.

Again, ask the poor needy, quill-driving clerk, who has his sick wife's pale face day and

night before him, telling of the frail life giving way under the struggle with poverty, and fading like a delicate flower before the smoky poisonous breath of the city. Her face haunts him at his desk, and peers at him in his sleep—when he can sufficiently deaden himself to his trouble to indulge in that luxury—with a silent and piteous appeal in every wasted feature for change of air—that's to say, if going away from that close court, where there is no air at all, to a place where there is, can be called a *change* of air. However, it's the phrase the doctor used when he said she must have it, or die. Oh, if he could only take her to the country, whence he had brought her a few short years before, a happy loving girl! But he can't; he can't afford it. It's as much out of his power to take her to the country as it would be to take the country to her; at least, he could take her to the country, but it would only be to starve there, and that would be out of the frying-pan into the fire, for work as he will he can only make enough to live from hand to mouth; and he can't give up his employment for a single day. Would not money—just a little money—purchase

health and happiness here? Even a ten-pound note; that would give them a month in some quiet little country village, and that would set her up again. It's too absurd. Happiness going for a ten-pound note!

Ask the languishing and fond young lovers, kept apart by a hitch in the settlements, whether money could not purchase *them* happiness?

Ask the aged and service-worn subaltern, over whose gray head countless numbers of beardless boys have gone, whether money could not have purchased happiness for him? It could have purchased promotion, and that's the same thing. That's the direction in which all his hopes point.

Ask the poor curate, trying to keep his head above water with a few millstones hanging about his neck and heels, in the shape of boys and girls with wonderful capacities for food and raiment, and with a horrible knack, like most other misfortunes, of not coming singly, whether money would not make *him* happy? Of course he preaches every Sunday, and says it cannot; but if you were to meet him just coming out of church,

and be the bearer of the glad tidings that his fifteenth cousin, twice removed, had just died and left him a nice little fortune, would not a gleam of happiness light up his very existence, notwithstanding all he had just been saying about the folly and emptiness of earthly riches? Would not the family with the large appetite, and the highly-developed faculty of wearing out clothes, cease to be so many mill-stones dragging him down, but be more like bladders buoying him up into a seventh heaven?

Did not money translate little Kit Trevor from the depths of debt and despair, as depicted in a previous chapter, to a life of joyousness, free from thought or care? Ask *him* if money did not on that occasion make him very happy and lighthearted.

Ask Tom Bullekeley, as he made his preparations for Leicestershire, and had never to stop at anything on the score of expense, whether money, or, what's the same thing, money's worth, in the shape of the rare stud of hunters he had got together, was not making *him* happy?

He was passionately fond of the sport, and

it was a passion inherited from his ancestors, and which had descended, without a break, through each successive generation of the Bullekeleys, from the time when they used to scour the Welsh forests to make up their share of the yearly tribute of wolves' heads, imposed on their country by Edward I.

Nothing stood between him and his favourite pastime. Health, money, time, everything was his to devote to it, without let or hindrance. No exercise was too much for the frame accustomed from early boyhood to every manly sport; no figure was too high for a horse he fancied; and "leave" he could get to any amount in the hunting season, in accordance with a time-honoured custom in the British army. The Duke of Wellington always encouraged hunting in officers, and no British leader has had the temerity, even if he had the inclination, to depart from a custom inaugurated by such an authority.

Of course every one in the regiment could not be equally fortunate in this respect, but they none of them grudged Tom his extra amount of leave. They felt proud of him,

and they felt he was a credit to the regiment, when the capital of the hunting world rang with his exploits.

All through the hunting season the *Field* and other sporting papers were eagerly read in the ante-room of the regiment, and many remarks broke from lounging and belpiped readers; such as, "By Jove! here's Tom Bullekeley cut down the whole field, at a devil of a place near a deep railway cutting!" or, "Hulloa! here's a bit of poetry about a certain 'gallant captain of Lancers.' That's Tom, of course!" or, "Hanged if that fellow, Tom, hasn't been and gone and swum the Wreake again, and been alone with the hounds for twenty minutes, and here's a long account of it," &c., &c.

These sporting crumbs were picked up and devoured nearly as eagerly in the regimental recreation room, where the men—particularly those of Tom's troop, who, for the nonce, quite scorned and looked down upon others not blessed with so sporting a captain—always crowded round the lucky holder of the paper, with loud invitations to him to "spit it out."

Tom's troop, however, towards the close of the last season, had felt themselves of such importance, that they had at last taken in the *Field* and *Bell's Life* to themselves, ever since which their conceit in the way of tightness of overalls, silver-headed whips, and pomatum knew no bounds.

Absorbing as Tom's passion was for the sport, he was never selfish in it, and what was still more extraordinary, considering that for several months out of every year he was thrown amongst a lot of men in whose opinion distinction in the hunting field was the only distinction on earth to be envied, he was not a jealous rider.

Nothing gave him greater pleasure than to give a mount to an ardent but needy devotee of the chase, and not even the most exciting of runs ever drove him beyond the bounds of fair emulation.

It was not in the man to be either selfish or jealous; and even the most selfish and jealous of natures ceased to be so when he was concerned. Envy or malice towards Tom Bullekeley no one ever felt, notwithstanding that his very excellence was in itself

quite enough to provoke both, according to the way of the world.

For the last four or five seasons Tom had hunted from Market Harboro', or Melton, and each year had seemed to him more enjoyable than the preceding; but never had any season promised so well, in every way, as the coming one.

Everything was all rose-coloured. Letters from numerous friends down in Leicestershire informing him of the more than usually glorious prospects of sport, worked him up to the highest pitch of anticipation. Then, again, he had never before had such a command of horse-flesh, both as regards quantity and quality, as would be at his disposal this year; and lastly, there was the charm of boon companionship to add to the other pleasures, and to fill up his cup of happiness to the very brim.

He and a party had taken a house at Melton. Such a party! The very pick almost of the men who would be down there. First and foremost (in Tom's eyes, at all events) was his friend Gwyn, and then there was Holderness in his own regiment, who, amongst the welter-

weights, was a marvel. Then there was young Lord Mountnessing (Blanche Vereker's brother) of the Coldstreams, with another young Guardsman, who had yet to win his spurs in the shires, but of whom report spake favourably; and lastly, there was little Captain Jack Pinkerton, late of the —th Lancers, who possessed a very unassuming stud himself, but who frequently bestowed on wealthy and ostentatious owners of large stables, at their own earnest solicitations, the unspeakable honour of riding their cattle, for such was the little captain's reputation for fine horsemanship, that it was an honour, and quite an act of condescension for him to throw his diminutive but sturdy little leg across an animal.

Never had Tom looked forward with so much unalloyed pleasure to anything before. Never had life appeared brighter even to *him*, whose whole life had been as bright and joyous as a school-boy's holiday, than when he contemplated the coming winter, pregnant with every enjoyment that chimed in most harmoniously with his tastes and his habits; and of all the sources of pleasure, first and

foremost was the fact that he had persuaded "dear old Pen" to be one of the party.

This had certainly been a matter of some little difficulty, but Gwyn had been unable to resist his friend's persuasive power, and had at last promised. His purse was not a very long one, and he could not afford to keep such a stud as Tom, but he hunted, as he did everything else (with the exception of his tirades against womankind) with judgment and moderation, and three days a week were quite enough for him; whereas for Tom and the others, six days out of the seven failed to satisfy their voracious appetites.

Nothing was forgotten in the preparations which experience could suggest or money obtain. The completeness with which everything was arranged, could only be compared to the precaution and dispositions of a skilful and prudent commander before a campaign.

That important department, the commissariat, had received due attention. A *chef* with the salary, very nearly, of a major-general, had already taken his departure for the joint establishment, together with nume-

rous assistants ; and the cellar had been stocked to an extent that bade defiance to hospitality, no matter how open-handed, to exhaust it.

Old soldiers fighting their battles over again are a mere joke to fox-hunters and their runs ; and the wine of wines, over which to kill a fox a dozen times in the evening after he has already received his *quietus* in the day, is port.

Men, who at other times eschew port and stick to claret after dinner, alter their tactics after a day's hunting.

A middle-aged man who generally fears gout, and before whom the ghost of a departed sire or grandsire holds up a warning toe, at such a time, treats the warning with contempt, and avenges his grandsire by punishing the port severely.

There is a time and season for everything, and the time and season for port wine is after a good dinner, after a good day with hounds. There is no doubt about it.

Tom knew this, so a quantity of wondrous old port had been transferred from the cellars at Lissington to the establishment at Melton

under the personal superintendence of old Walters' rival, the butler, a duty of so trying and ticklish a nature, that at one stage of the journey he is reported to have become insensible, and to have remained so for some hours, under the fearful weight of responsibility.

Just the day before the party were to start, little Jack Pinkerton ran down to Hawley, enticed thither by the rumour of a "big night" at mess that evening, and the prospect of journeying on, the next day, with Gwyn, Holderness, and Tom.

According to custom, he put up with the last mentioned, and as he happened to arrive at the barracks at that gloomy time when every one was on parade, he employed himself, in a characteristic manner, in examining his host's cutting whips, and hunting crops, and scrutinising fastidiously the different shades of his tops, until their owner clattered into the room from parade, and saluted his visitor after a very noisy and boisterous fashion.

"Hooray!" said Tom, unbuckling his sword, after the noisy greetings were over, and

throwing it carelessly into a corner with a crash. "There's the last of *that* little grind for a few months ! By Jove ! we've got a tremendous amount of talent together in our lot—a most beautifully balanced crew. There's Gwyn will represent the intellectual ; Mountnessing and his pal, the sporting ; and you, Jack, the rowdy and generally disreputable element ; while Aunt Sally will act as a sort of ballast to keep the ship steady."

"And what the devil will *you* do ?" asked little Pinkerton, who was as accustomed to be called "rowdy" as he was to be called "Jack." "I should think Holderness has got his work cut out if he's got to keep you pretty steady."

"Do ? Anything you like," replied Tom, "from pitch and toss to manslaughter. I feel I shan't quiet down until I've had a rattling good thirty-five minutes."

Here Tom proceeded to get out of harness, varying the usual dulness of the operation, by shying each article, as he divested himself of it, at Jack Pinkerton, who dodged the missiles with wonderful dexterity and good-humour.

First of all, came a pair of gauntlets ; then

a forage cap ; then a pouch and belt which disappeared through the window behind the mercurial and diminutive little man ; then a stable jacket which skimmed through the air, and finally lodged on the prongs of a pair of antlers ; then, as the game became fascinating, a few articles of upholstery, some of them following the lead the pouch had given them through the window panes, others finding billets amongst the chimney ornaments and pictures, but none coming in contact with Captain Pinkerton's small person.

" Well, you *are* a duffer ! Haven't hit me once."

" You're so infernally little !" said Tom.

" Well, hit one of your own size ! Here you are ! Here is Aunt Sally ! three shots a penny, gents ! Have a shy at him !"

The suggestion was too much in accordance with the dictates of his own humour to be lost on Tom, so, as the corpulent young nobleman entered the room, a sofa cushion skimmed across the room into his face, depriving it of its invariable and chief ornament, a pipe.

" Well, I *am* an unlucky beggar with my pipes !" said Holderness, without betraying

any surprise whatever. "How are you, Jack? I'm an ass ever to go into your society, Tom, with a valuable pipe. Confound you!"

"Just look what he calls a valuable pipe!" said Tom, laughingly holding up with the tongs the fractured bowl of a dirty little black clay pipe that would have seemed out of place anywhere but in an Irishman's *caubeen*.

Like a ship carrying spare spars to replace those shot away in action or lost by stress of weather, Holderness always had a supply of pipes stowed away about his person, ready for any emergency or accident, and it was not long before he was fitted with a fresh one, and was blowing away silently and contentedly in an arm-chair.

"I say, we ought to have sent him down, Tom, a few days before to air the place. He'd be better than any amount of fires," said Pinkerton.

"How did you prevail on Gwyn to join us, Tom?" asked Holderness, with his good-humoured smile at the last remark. "I know I never could manage it."

"I've not seen him in Leicestershire," said

little Pinkerton, "since his young brother Alan went to grief, and hit poor old Pen so deuced hard."

"I don't know how I managed it. I've often tried, but never could get him until this time. Hulloo, old fellow! we were just talking of you."

"Here, Tom, you careless beggar!" said Gwyn entering and nodding to Jack Pinkerton, "here's a letter for you, marked '*Immediate and pressing*,' been kicking about the ante-room all the morning."

"I know," said Tom; "I saw it when I went to breakfast. It's only a business one."

"*Only* a business one!" said Gwyn.

"Yes, from my lawyer. He always sticks 'immediate' on my letters in the hopes of getting me to answer them quickly."

"But *this* has got 'and pressing,'" said Gwyn.

"Ah, I suppose he sees I've got accustomed to the 'immediate,' and is pitching it a bit stronger, that's all."

"Open it, Tom!" said Gwyn in his quiet tones, and handing the letter.

"All right. Anything for a quiet life!"

said Tom, tearing open the envelope, and reading the contents ; after which, he handed the letter back to Gwyn with “ *You* read it, Pen. Do you think I ought to go ?”


“ Of course you ought !” was the reply, “ why, he says he wishes to see you at once on a matter of *vital importance*. He puts it as strong as words and underlining can make it. Of course you must run up to town at once !”

“ What a nuisance !” said Tom. “ What *can* it be ? It’s certain to turn out something he could have done quite as well without me. However, I’ll take your advice, Pen, and the sooner I go, the sooner I’ll be back.”

In an hour Tom was in a smoking carriage of the “ up ” express, laughing and talking with a couple of brother officers he had prevailed upon to accompany him. He was such a favourite amongst them all that he hardly ever stated his intention of going anywhere, without there being a pretty general cry of “ and I’ll go, too !”

CHAPTER XII.

A STARTLING DISCLOSURE,

HAT night, at about twelve o'clock, Gwyn, Holderness, and Jack Pinkerton sat in Tom's room, awaiting his return by the last train from town, the one he had promised to come down by.

The "big night" at mess had been rather flat, owing, mainly, to the absence of that promoter of all mirth and hilarity, Tom.

There had been a general chorus all through the evening of "Where's that fellow Tom Bullekeley?" "What's he started up to town, in such a deuce of a hurry for?" and many other similar inquiries, and there had been a very generally expressed hope that he

might yet "turn up" and enliven them a little. But he had not done so, and there had been no one to start the fun, or to lead it; and, one by one, the guests had departed, and their hosts had betaken themselves to their quarters. Gwyn, Holderness, and Jack Pinkerton adjourned to Tom's room, which, as a general lounge for the regiment, partly owing to its comfortable ottomans and sofas, and partly owing to its owner's popularity, was nearly as much patronised as the ante-room.

Little Jack Pinkerton, whose idea of earthly happiness, out of the "pigskin," was a "rowdy night," with grilled bones to follow at four a.m., was fearfully scandalised and disgusted at the quiet and decorum which had characterised the evening.

He had done everything that man could do to turn the tide. He had thrown himself single-handed into the breach, and sung a comic song. He had given them a figure of the *can-can*, when the band had been playing *La Grande Duchesse* Quadrilles, but brevity, although the soul of wit, is certainly not (as far as legs are concerned) the soul of the *can-can*, and *that* performance had fallen flat, as

had the performer himself, on the hearth-rug, in the execution of too exalted a *pas*. He had blackened with a burnt cork the face of young Molter, who had fallen asleep—in short, he had done everything in his power to throw a little life into the evening; but, beyond drinking himself into a highly flushed state of hilarity, all his attempts had met with but indifferent success.

The hilarious stage having now passed away, it was succeeded by a gloomy and despondent one, and he sat moodily bewailing the sad change for the worse which had befallen the regiment.

“Ah,” he said, shaking his head, “the old corps isn’t what it used to be in *my* days. If Tom Bullekeley had only been here, we *might* have had some fun. Confound that cursed old lawyer of his! Never mind: we won’t despair yet,” added little Pinkerton, drawing hope and comfort from a long pull at his soda and brandy. “We may still retrieve the fortunes of the day, or, rather, of the night. When Tom comes we’ll make a night of it yet, and we’ll go and draw some of those lazy beggars who have sloped off to

their rooms. Damme ! going to bed before twelve o'clock ! They're a disgrace to their cloth ! If *I* had anything to do with it, I'd try each one of 'em for 'conduct unbecoming the character of an officer and a gentleman !' I suppose it's Fane Vereker's having married has played the devil !"

At this, Gwyn, who had been puffing away at his pipe in silence, joined in.

"At all events it's played the devil with *him*, as it does with every man."

Gwyn was just in the humour for one of his tirades, and Pinkerton having struck the key-note, he was just going to launch out into the old tune which the reader, by this time, knows so well, when Tom made his appearance without any forewarning of his approach, in the shape of a whistle, or a *hulloa*, or a snatch of a song, as was his usual custom.

"Well, you fellows ! Everything is very quiet to-night. It's very kind of you to wait here for me."

The words were Tom's, certainly, but the manner and the tone were not. So noticeable was the change, that Gwyn and Holderness each looked up inquiringly ; but little Pinker-

ton, who was too screwed to take any particular notice of anything, replied,

“Kind of us? Oh, yes! very—at least, I can answer for myself—very kind indeed; considering that it consists in drinking your liquor, and smoking your cigars. I must be a very kind-hearted fellow, for, do you know, I feel a real pleasure in performing kindnesses of this sort.”

“That’s right! Glad to hear you’ve made yourself comfortable, Jack,” said Tom, laying his hand kindly on the shoulder of the little man, who continued, with the garrulity of inebriation: “Yes, I must have a great deal of the milk of human kindness in my composition ——”

“Pshaw, drunken little sweep!” interrupted Gwyn. “It would very soon become milk-punch in your case.—Well, did you see your lawyer, Tom?”

“Yes.”

“And was it ‘something he could have done equally well without you?’”

“Not exactly,” replied Tom. “What sort of a night have you had?”

“Beastly slow!” said Pinkerton; “wanted

you to set them going. The regiment's going to the deuce, Tom. We'll have to ask some of them up to our establishment just to show them how to do things. We'll have a gay old time of it then, eh, Tom, my boy?"

"Yes, I hope you'll have a jolly time of it ; but *I'm* not going to Melton at all."

"NOT GOING?" burst from every one, while each showed his surprise in a different manner. Holderness took the pipe from between his teeth, and stared open-mouthed ; Gwyn looked fixedly at his friend with knit brows ; and little Pinkerton jumped to his feet with a wild stagger—not the first, by any means, that evening, but it was the last. No pump—no matter how icy its stream, or how copious its flow, ever had such a sobering effect as Tom's words, "*I'm* not going," had on the little man. From the moment that their import reached him, he was sober.

"Are you drunk, Tom?" he asked.

"You must be humbugging?" said Holderness.

"Nothing serious occurred to any of your people, I hope?" asked Gwyn.

"I'm not drunk, Jack — I'm not hum-

bugging, Holderness, and, thank God! nothing serious has occurred to any of my people, Pen, old boy. But the fact is I'm not going because I can't afford it—that's all."

"Well I'm d——d!" said little Pinkerton, prefacing his remark with a long, low whistle. "What Jack Pinkerton can afford, Tom Bullekeley can, I should think!"

"I don't know that," said Tom. "Tom Bullekeley isn't quite so well off as you thought him, or as he thought himself, when he last saw you all."

"What *do* you mean, Tom? If anything is wrong tell us at once what it is?" said Gwyn. "What have you heard from your lawyer to-day?"

"Well, to go at once to the point; I've heard to-day that Lissington doesn't, and never did, properly belong to me; and all these long years that I've been under the impression that it has, I've been keeping the right man out. But I won't do so any longer. My lawyer says I'm a fool for giving it up without a fight; but I don't think so. That may be *his*, or any other lawyer's, idea of

honour. It isn't mine, though, and Lissington goes, no matter what lawyers say or advise, to the man to whom, by right, it belongs, without a moment's delay—I shall hold it in trust until he arrives. There's one consolation, the dear old place goes to a man I've known and like, and who knows my people almost as if he were one of the family; so I shall be able to go there and make myself at home, and have a day's shooting when I want it. He'll keep on all the servants and people about the house and estate, if I ask him to, and he'll be a good landlord to all the tenants, I know, so, thank God, Lissington won't be so much changed, after all, and it won't be as if it were going into the hands of strangers!"

Here Tom, who had been standing on the rug facing his audience, turned round and threw himself, rather wearily, into an arm-chair. As he had spoken the last few words about the old place, old associations had crowded thickly upon him, so as to bring his loss more painfully home than ever, and he sat for a few minutes, gazing into the fire wrapped in his thoughts, which, all honour to

him, were not so much of himself, as of his sister and niece, whose hearts would, he knew, be wrung by the bitter news.

None of his three friends spoke. They felt that those moments of silence were being devoted to thoughts which were better not broken in upon by useless, though kind, expressions of sympathy.

Gwyn got up and took two or three turns up and down the room with a troubled countenance; while each of the other two proffered what was his own idea of a *panacea* for all ills. Little Jack Pinkerton conveyed his suggestion to drown sorrow in the flowing bowl in an unobtrusive but touching manner, by gently jogging his friend's elbow with a foaming tumbler of brandy and soda; and Holderness filled his own pet pipe with his own pet tobacco, and put it into Tom's hand with an invitation to take a "few whiffs, old fellow."

Tom took the two offerings with one of his own merry old laughs, and sipped and puffed, and puffed and sipped, to the great relief of his two friends.

"Now, I'm off!" said Holderness when he

saw the pipe fairly going. "Good-night, Tom!"

"And so am I. I'll go and have a smoke with you for a bit in your room, Holderness. I'll be back again, Tom, I dare say, before you've turned in," said Pinkerton, who was going to sleep in one of Tom's two rooms.

"What's the use of hurrying away, you fellows?" said Tom. "I shan't turn in for ever so long yet."

Holderness and Pinkerton, however, were not to be persuaded, and off they went.

"You see," said Holderness, directly they were in the passage, "Gwyn's his great chum, and this is an occasion when a man would like to have a quiet talk alone with a chum, particularly such a fellow as Gwyn is, so I thought we'd better leave them alone."

"Yes," said Pinkerton, "I twigged directly you spoke. By Jove! I was as tight as Chloe before Tom came, but it has knocked me all of a heap into a most painful state of sobriety."

"Well, Tom, old friend, tell me all about it," said Gwyn, as soon as the two were alone. "To tell you the truth, I can't under-

stand how a thing of the sort can happen with such startling suddenness. I shan't be able to realise it until I hear some of the particulars."

"Well, don't look so horribly down in the mouth, Pen, or you'll make me forget the bright side altogether; for there *is* a bright side, old fellow; although, I must admit, it all looked precious dark to me at first."

"Well done, Tom!" said Gwyn, heartily. "I'd back you, of all men I ever met, to pick out a bright spot in anything; well, and what is it?"

"Well, it goes to a man I know and like, and it might have been worse; it might have gone to a perfect stranger, or some brute that I hated."

"Rather hard to find that latter individual," said Gwyn, "for I never heard of your hating any one; and who is the man?"

"A fellow called Clennell, on his way home from India."

"An army man?"

"Yes—I don't think you have ever met him."

"No; but how, in the name of all that's

wonderful, does he suddenly supplant you in this way?"

"Well, you see, my great-grandfather, also a Tom, was an extravagant sort of a beggar, and what between keeping open house and a pack of hounds down in the country, and gambling and knocking about up in town, besides indulging in a few more expensive tastes, he managed to get so hard up, that he sold Lissington to an old Sir Hugh Carteret, who lived at a place just close by, called Mynors Court, where Molter's people live now."

"I know," said Gwyn, nodding his head, "pompous old snob with the loud voice."

"Yes, the same. Well, this old Sir Hugh had three daughters, the youngest of whom married this same fellow Tom, my great-grandfather, and with her Lissington came back again into the family and has descended down to me. Well, this we all knew, right enough; but now comes the startling novelty. This old Sir Hugh's two other daughters had both married against his wishes, one to a fellow called Clennell, and the other to a man whose name I don't recollect; and we were

always under the impression that it was in consequence of their disobedience that he had passed them over and left Lissington to the youngest daughter. But it turns out, now, that the old fellow, at the very last, had some qualms of conscience, and made another will, which was really his last one, leaving Lissington to his eldest daughter, or if she were dead, or had had no children, it was to go to the second, and so on. But the eldest *had* children, and Fred Clennell, the fellow I was telling you about, is her great-grandson, so that Lissington belongs to him by right, and not to me."

"How is it this will, though, has never turned up until now?"

"I don't know," said Tom; "but there it's been lying amongst a lot of rubbish, so much waste paper, for all these ages down at Mynors Court, until the Molters' lawyer ferreted it out a short time ago, and first of all told a fellow who is descended from the second daughter whom he happened to know, and then, thinking that it would only be fair not to keep me in the dark, went to my lawyer, who did not bother me about it until

he had gone into the whole thing himself and made certain about it."

"How do you know, Tom, that it's not a forgery, or a plant of some infernal lawyer's?" asked Gwyn.

"For three very good, or rather very bad reasons. In the first place, my lawyer has seen this will, and says he has no doubt himself about its being genuine. In the second, the Molter man belongs to a firm above suspicion; and in the third, it can't be a plant, when the person who gets the property isn't an accomplice."

"What does your lawyer say, though, about your giving up the property like this?"

"Why, he says that I ought to make the other side *prove* their right, no matter if it was as plain to us as the nose on his face, and that's saying a good deal, Pen, for it's a bottle one of the deepest dye. The poor old boy is awfully cut up about it, and called my conduct every name he could think of, beginning with *Quixotic*, and ending with *idiotic*."

"Do your people know about it?"

"No, not yet. I shall go down to Lissing-

ton to-morrow instead of to Leicestershire, and tell them all."

For an hour or two longer, the two sat talking upon the one absorbing subject ; and then Gwyn, with a hearty shake of the hand and a few manly words of affection, wished Tom good-night.

Half-an-hour afterwards, little Jack Pinkerton came into the room to repair to his "shakedown," and found Tom in bed, sleeping peacefully as a child.


He was the only one of the four, though, who slept peacefully that night.

Both Gwyn and Pinkerton lay awake as keenly alive to the misfortune as if they themselves had been the victims; and Holder-ness's servant, when he came into his master's room in the morning to get his "tub" ready, suddenly found himself in the midst of a sort of London November fog, looming through which, like the sun through the same, was his master's countenance.

"Well, I'm blessed ! if he hasn't been at it all night !" soliloquised the man. "I wonder what's up ? That's his way when anything goes wrong."

CHAPTER XIII.

A BITTER PILL.

“OESN'T belong to you? Lissington not yours? Oh, Tom, darling!” and the two women burst into bitter tears, and hung about him, and looked up into his manly face, beaming down upon them with a cheerfulness that deprived even such a stunning piece of intelligence of half its force.

“Come and sit down, Kate and May. It isn't half so bad when you hear all.”

Half bewildered, they sat down again on the seats from which they had started, and thrown themselves upon him, when he had first electrified them with his announcement.

“No, it's really not so bad, when you hear

all. Who do you think is the rightful owner of Lissington, and has been all the time?"

"Oh! how can we guess, Tom?" said May, tearfully.

"Why, Fred Clennell!"

"Fred Clennell!" exclaimed May and her mother together.

"Heaven! How extraordinary!" said the latter.

"Oh, this must be a dream!" said May. "I shall wake up in a few minutes, I know I shall, and find that I'm in bed, and that it's pitch dark, and about two o'clock in the morning, and I shall make you all laugh at breakfast when I come down, telling you all about it."

"No, it's real enough, May, little girl, and I'll explain the whole thing to you both."

Then Tom related a good deal of what he had told Gwyn, with the exception of that part of the family history already familiar to his hearers.

At its conclusion May said, "No, I'm afraid it's no dream; but, somehow, I can't, oh, I can't, take it in! Can you, darling mamma?"

Kate Chichester did not answer the question. Her eyes were fixed on her brother, although she could hardly see him for the blinding tears which welled up into her eyes, and coursed down her cheeks.

"He hardly realises it yet," she thought, as she looked at Tom's cheerful face. "But, oh! he'll feel it so, when it forces itself upon him in a hundred different privations that he has never known."

"Tom," she said, placing her hand on his, "you'll only have a mere pittance to live upon—two or three hundred a-year."

"That's about the modest figure, Kate, I should say," acquiesced Tom, brightly.

"Oh, you'll never be able to exist on that, Tom! You could never be happy as a poor man; you, who are so generous, so liberal, so fond of society, so wrapt up in sport, so courted! Oh! Tom, my darling brother, I realise it more than you do, for it's not in your nature to look on the gloomy side of anything. It means, although you don't see it just yet, a severance from nearly all your pursuits and amusements,—from all those manly sports you excel in, and are admired so

for, from your brother officers who idolise you. But you shan't, Tom—you shan't have to give up all this ; I'll suffer any privation sooner. I'm tolerably well off, May and I will go and live quietly in some out-of-the-way place, where we're not known, and then you needn't give up everything. Grant me this favour, Tom, I implore you ! Promise me you'll let me help you. Beg him, May ; beg him, darling !”

“ Oh, do, *do*, Tom !” said little May, who had been trying hard, between her own sobs and her mother's vehemence, to get in a word of passionate entreaty of her own. “ Do ! We've always been quiet here. We've not been accustomed to be run after and courted as you have. We won't have to give up anything like what you would have. We'll go somewhere with only old Walters as a servant, and I'll work day and night, and be, oh so happy, if you'll only do as mamma asks you. Do, Tom !”

“ There, Tom, you hear her,” chimed in Kate Chichester. “ We should be quite happy and contented leading a quiet life ; but you, Tom, *you* could never be, you've never

been accustomed to it. You would be miserable without your hunting, and your shooting, and society. Promise me at least that you'll not give up this year's hunting. I can afford it, Tom. Don't sell your horses. You've been looking forward——"

"Kate," said Tom, checking her, for her fervour seemed to know no bounds, "Kate," he said, with just a little tremor in his voice, "you have always been such a kind sister to me that I should not be surprised at your affection for me carrying you to any lengths. You've always stuck by me through thick and thin ever since I was a little child, and if I were to repay you for all these years of kindness by robbing you and yours, I should be an infernal scoundrel, and a disgrace to the family. No, if I take a penny from you, or from little May there, may I be——. Well, there. Don't think me unkind or ungrateful, but I speak like this to show you, once for all, that it's impossible, and that it is useless trying to persuade me. No, Kate, I'll bear the misfortune like a man, and not like a miserable sneaking devil."

This ought to have been very convincing ;

but both Kate Chichester and May failed to see the case in Tom's light, and, instead of desisting, only redoubled their efforts to bring him over to their way of thinking, until at last Tom bolted to the stables.

"Ah," sighed his sister, "it's an old trick of his; whenever he's thwarted in anything he always goes to the horses. I think it must be that there's something kindred in their honest noble natures."

On his way to his equine friends, Tom met old Walters, to whom, in the course of conversation, he communicated the dire news.

When the old man at last grasped the fact, which he was a long time in doing, owing to the foundations of his belief in everything upon earth having previously to be sapped, his first proceeding was to snort like a war-horse of the fiercest description; his second, to open his eyes to their full extent, and roll them wildly; and his last, to occupy a recumbent position on the gravel walk with a suddenness that eluded Tom's muscular arm, and a mighty concussion that produced an earthquake among the surrounding flower-beds for a radius of several yards, and there, in that

position, to have an apoplectic fit of a serious nature.

The poor old man was immediately carried into the house, and all the family were soon at his side, showing, by their anxiety and tenderness, how warmly the affection and attachment of the faithful old servant was reciprocated. May was the first person his eyes rested on when he returned to consciousness.

"God bless you, Miss May! Where's Master Tom?"

"Here," said Tom, approaching.

"Ah," said the old man, with a forced smile, "I was a bit surprised like at first, Master Tom. Just a bit took aback, as it might be, you know. That's all!"

In his wish to make the best of it, and to be jolly under the circumstances, poor old Walters spoke as if apoplexy were a very ordinary mode of testifying surprise, and going down with a flop on the broad of one's back, a very natural and usual consequence of being "just a bit took aback, as it might be."

"All right, Walters! Don't go thinking

about it," said Tom, taking the faithful old fellow's hand, and squeezing it.

The cause of the seizure soon penetrated to the servants' hall, and though no one, in showing his or her sorrow, went the length of old Walters, who, it may be said, went his *full* length; still, there was more distress and concern felt than would generally have found their way to those regions on an occasion of the kind; for servants, as a class, are not affected by the trials and troubles of their employers further than feelings of self-interest may command their sympathies. As a rule, the hardship and importance of such a downfall would merely be measured by the amount of trouble anticipated in getting a fresh place, or the chances against getting so good a one.

It was different at Lissington, though. Nearly all the servants had been born and bred about the place, and the misfortune to Tom was a calamity to every one, from the butler and the housekeeper, to Buttons and the smallest scullery-maid.

The following day, the old family lawyer came down, bringing with him a vague feel-

ing of reassurance and comfort to Kate Chichester and May, just as a physician, merely by his presence, imparts hope and fresh courage to a household where there is sickness. The family lawyer is to worldly prosperity what the family doctor is to bodily health; and each, in his own line, is often a source of comfort, even when affairs are too hopeless for him to be of any practical use.

The consolation was *not* mutual, for the old man, in his first interview with them, was quite unmanned. He had felt the sudden and unexpected blow keenly from the first, but had not shown it much before Tom, whose policy in the matter had aroused a combativeness in his legal nature that was not favourable to the melting mood. But, under the softening influence of women, he fairly gave way.

It was very nearly as great a severance of old ties and old associations to him, as to the family at Lissington itself, for the management of the Bullekeley affairs had been a legal charge handed down to him from his father.

His object in coming down was to again try and dissuade Tom from giving in without a fight, but he failed signally. Tom was inexorable, and at last grew so warm on the subject that the old man became convinced of the inutility of any further attempts at dissuasion on his part. This was a sad disappointment to him, for, putting aside all private considerations and sentiment, his feelings as a lawyer had been outraged. At the very first alarm he had sniffed litigation in the air, and had at once commenced buckling on his armour, and sharpening his lance for the fray ; and now, after all, he had to put them away without striking a single blow.

His visit, however, was not entirely fruitless, for, before his departure, he succeeded, at the instigation and with the active co-operation of Tom—and a hard fight the allies had of it—in dissipating the economy-in-a-cottage *cum* Walters-as-an-only-servant plan, and substituting for it the more sensible arrangement, that Kate Chichester was to continue her residence at Lissington until the arrival of Clennell ; or, as Tom put it, in

military phraseology, she was to "mark time" for the present.

It was also further determined that all existing arrangements with regard to the property were to remain as they were.

Matters being so far settled, Tom felt that he would be holding a false position if he did not at once communicate to every one connected with the Lissington property the real state of affairs; so, on the following day, he convened them all, tenants, gamekeepers, grooms, labourers, &c., &c., and in a few manly words that went straight to the hearts of his hearers, told them how Lissington had passed from himself to Clennell, and how they must for the future look upon the latter as their landlord, or their master.

There were few, if any, who had not already heard the tidings, as the subject had been the general topic, almost to the exclusion of all market business, the day before at Hurlingford.

Blessings in every form, and good wishes in every variety, were showered upon him from all sides; and, at last, a bluff old farmer, making hideous grimaces in his endeavours

to gulp down his feelings, jumped upon a table, and called for "Three cheers for Cap'en Tom Bullekeley, whom they would never forget, and who would *always* be to them what he always *had* been, 'TOM BULLEKELEY OF LISSINGTON,' no matter what lawyers or wills might say to the contrary—God bless and prosper him!"

Three deafening cheers arose in response to this appeal, and then Tom thanked them in a few words, and finally asked them to give three cheers for Clennell.

There was a silence at this. No one seemed inclined to cheer. And, at last, the fat old farmer, looking down from the table, from which, in his excitement, he had quite forgotten to descend, said, "It's dead agen our nature. We *can't* do it, Cap'en Tom!"

"If I wish it, I'm sure you will," said Tom. "Give him a cheer for *my* sake, now, and some day you'll give him one for his own, I'm certain."

"All right, boys! The Cap'en wishes it. It's to oblige *him*."

At this, three formal cheers were given,

under protest, as it were, and the meeting dispersed.

This was a bitter pill, but Tom swallowed it like a man, and did not even make a wry face.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE UNPLEASANT SPECTRE.

"Friendship, mysterious cement of the soul,
Sweetener of life, and solder of society,
I owe thee much."

Blair.



AFTER Tom had made these arrangements, he returned to headquarters, where, to his surprise, he still found Gwyn, who had given up his leave and projected hunting at Melton on his friend's involuntary secession from that scheme.

There was no doubt that Tom—although there was no idle melancholy or repining about him—was sobered down greatly by the change which had come over his affairs.

He was still full of fun and spirit; but, somehow, he was not the same original Tom

Bullekeley. There was never now the wild, reckless *abandon* to mirth and jollity; never the boyish bursts of spirits that used to flash out and be so characteristic of him.

Kate Chichester was right when she had said that the realisation of the change would force itself gradually upon him.

First of all, the sale of his hunters up at Melton was like a slap in the face accompanying the reminder that he had done with such things, and that the dreams and bright anticipations of the last few weeks were never to be realised.

This was a very sore point, and the soreness was kept up in a partially raw state, by the graphic letters of the Leicestershire correspondents to the sporting papers, and the glowing descriptions of sport he himself received from Holderness, Jack Pinkerton, and various other friends.

Then a horrid spectre, whose acquaintance he had never made until now, began to haunt him in all his pleasures, such as they were. It sat at meals with him. It got up behind him as he cantered along on one of his chargers to a meet, in the next

county, of the North. Slowshire hounds (on the principle of anything being better than nothing). It sat next to him as he drove the regimental drag along the turnpike road. It jogged his elbows, as he put down his name for a subscription to the local pack of hounds. In fact, there were very few things he did, that this spectre was not beside him, marring enjoyment, and making itself generally unpleasant. It was not an entertaining spectre by any means, and its one remark was, "I say, you can't afford these sort of things now, you know!"

But, although it was its only remark, it was a very pointed one, and, what was extraordinary, although so much used, it never seemed to lose its point. On the contrary, it appeared sharper, and went deeper, with each repetition, until it made Tom think seriously, and created a financial panic in his mind, and a painful doubt of his being able to continue even in his present way of life, notwithstanding all the sacrifices he had already made.

In this state of mind he was wont, in his conversations with Gwyn, to lead that much-

looked-up-to brother officer to discourse and descant on the subject of impecuniosity, with a view to eliciting some valuable information and advice on a subject which was entirely new to him, and which was as unpleasant as it was novel.

On one of these occasions, the oracle, having been invoked by an offering of tobacco and diluted spirit, thus spoke :

“ *Impecuniositas*, or the state of being hard up, is a disease, or, I shall say, enemy, against which peculiar and especial tactics must be used. It must never be fought against. It must be retired before. You must never continue to hold a position it once attacks, but must immediately abandon it for another one, more remote, and less exalted. If you attempt to keep the position it attacks you in, you must be smashed up in the end.”

Here the oracle paused, applied himself to the offerings in both shapes, and thus, having gathered fresh inspiration, continued :

“ I’m talking, of course, of where you’re entirely dependent on your own resources, and not counting on any powerful allies

coming up to your assistance, in the shape of legacies, or anything of that sort. However, if they were to, the chances are that, instead of remaining safe where you were, you would be tempted to occupy a more advanced position, and there invite attack again, so it would be all the same. The only thing is retreat. Not a regular contested retreat, with your face to the foe, disputing every inch, and all that sort of thing; but a regular 'cut and run.' The great mistake that people make is, that they will never retreat far enough at *first*. They retire little by little, where the insidious enemy follows and harasses them step by step; whereas, they ought to have gone slap at once a long way to the rear, out of his reach, without attempting to occupy any intermediate position, no matter how tempting or tenable it may have appeared. To be plain," said Gwyn, descending in his style a little, as he saw that, although there were admiration and attention in Tom's countenance, there was also, to a certain extent, mystification; "to be plain, when a fellow finds he can't live the pace in a race, the sooner he shuts up and

enters for something else, with not quite such a fast lot running, the better."

"Right you are, Pen! Them's my sentiments. Let's hear something more instructive and improving?" said Tom, to whom the last style of metaphor had appealed more forcibly than the former.

Gwyn gathered fresh inspiration, laughed, and went on.

"If fellows would only look their difficulties, when they first begin, straight in the face, and take them on the first hop, instead of shutting their eyes to them, we should not be so eternally treated to the spectacle of a broken-down gentleman, who hangs on miserably to his former position."

"But what can the poor devil do? He must try, at all events, and live like a gentleman, if he *is* one," said Tom, ever ready in the defence of the unfortunate.

"Much better to live like a good healthy cad, than a decayed gentleman, any day," said Gwyn. "I know lots of fellows, and so do you, Tom, who have been in the service, and have gone to grief, who lead that hanging-on sort of life. Of course, the other pro-

fessions furnish a certain number, too, but we don't happen to come across them. There are two or three of them I know in particular, who ran through everything they had, and then their commission went, and now they hang on at the club, making a little by pool and cards ; and, when they're out of play, or out of luck, they're not above borrowing a fiver from you, but, somehow, are a great deal above ever paying it back. Don't you think I'd have much respect for them, and much sooner be seen with them, if they had dropped the gentleman when they hadn't the means to support the position, and tried something lower, and worked their way up, or tried to ?”

“What the deuce were they to do ?” said Tom. “To dig perhaps they could not, and to beg they were ashamed. Eh ?”

“I don't see why they shouldn't dig, and it strikes me that borrowing without the intention of paying back, is uncommonly like begging.”

“Well, suggest something, Pen ! What would you have them do ?”

“Do ? *Anything* ! Set up a tobacconist's

shop on a small scale: they'd know something of the stock-in-trade, then. If a gentleman finds his pocket empty, the very *first* thing he ought to put in it is his pride; but they never will, they go hanging on, until eventually they come down to something much worse than the tobacconist's shop, or digging. It's like a man who has something the matter with his hand, and won't have it amputated, as the doctor advises, until, at last, it gets so bad that he gives in; and then, when the hand is off, they find out that the disease has spread to the arm, and they must perform another operation, and take the whole arm off, but he'll only consent to its being taken off below the elbow. Then he has to have it cut above; and then, at last, it has to be taken out of the socket, and probably the man kicks the bucket, whereas, if he had had a good slice off at first, he would only have had to undergo the pain of an operation once, and have been all right. Men never will cut deep enough at *first* when poverty is the disease. Lor' bless me! what a rate I've been jawing at. I declare, I never

came across such a fellow to draw me out, as you are, Tom. It's devilish easy to preach, and here I've been going it like a steam engine of fifty Methodist power, when all the time I should probably do just the same sort of thing myself."

These observations of Gwyn, together with the never-ending remark of the spectre, soon convinced Tom that he could no longer stay in the regiment; and this conviction was immediately followed by the determination to exchange to the Infantry—if possible, to Kit Trevor's regiment, as, in addition to his friendship with Kit, he had made several acquaintances in the corps when it was quartered near Lissington. So he wrote a letter to his young friend, telling him all about the recent reverse, and asking him if there was any captain open to an exchange in his regiment?

It was with a heavy heart that Tom wrote this letter; but he thought the sacrifice necessary, and he was determined to make it.

It was not until after he had received, by return of post, an answer from Kit Trevor,

expressing his sympathy with all the ingenuousness of youth, and telling him of an exchange, that he informed Gwyn of his intentions.

“Leave the old corps, Tom? You can’t! The fellows won’t hear of it. It wouldn’t be the same regiment without you. It’s an impossibility, so don’t let’s talk any more about it.”

These were Gwyn’s first exclamations, but he soon saw how thoroughly in earnest Tom was, and he changed his tone.

“Tom, old fellow, don’t be angry at what I’m going to say. You’d do what I ask, if you could only know how the request comes from the very bottom of my heart, and what a kindness you’d be doing me. I’m not a rich man, Tom, but I’m not an extravagant one, or I haven’t got any expensive tastes, and I’ve more than I want. Take it, Tom, and stay with us. We all love you, old boy, and there’s not a fellow in the regiment who would not make the same offer to you, if they dared; but not one of them can be such a friend of yours as *I* am, so you won’t mind it from me. You’ll do it, won’t you, Tom?”

"No, Pen, I can't; it's impossible!"

"Do, Tom! I ask it more for *my* sake than yours. It's selfishness on my part. Don't be above taking a helping hand held out to you by your old chum."

"I'm not above it, Pen. I'm not above taking a helping hand from *any* friend, much less from *you*, but I am above living on any one, no matter whether it's a friend like you, Pen, or a sister like my sister Kate. I refused *her*, Pen, and now I must refuse *you*, old boy."

"You don't know, Tom, what a blessing and a comfort your friendship and company have been to me; and I hardly knew it myself until now. If it wasn't for you I should be much more of a moping and discontented brute than I am. When I've been brooding over that damned curse that has nearly blighted my whole existence, a few good-natured words from you and some friendly chaff have made me forget it for a time. I owe a great deal more to you than any filthy money can ever repay. I've confided to you as I thought I could never have confided to any man breathing. You know

how I hate women, and always shall. *All* men don't; in fact, nearly all men end in giving up everything for them, but *I* never shall. Let me give up something for you. My life hasn't been a happy one. I've carried with me for years—Hang it, Tom! don't reduce a fellow to a position of having to beg like this."

"I can only say what I've said before, Pen. It's painful for me to refuse you, when you do beg like that, but it's impossible."

"You won't, then, Tom?"

"No, Pen, old boy; I can't."

"Very well, then. I'll exchange, too, into the same regiment. That's all!"

CHAPTER XV.

“THE WORM I’ THE BUD.”



WHILE these changes had been taking place, Blanche Vereker, with Fane and her little girl, had been on a short visit to the Continent. She had begun to look so fragile and delicate that the family physician had recommended change of air at once, and Fane had obtained a short leave of absence, and taken her away for a fortnight. They returned a few days after the events of the last chapter, only in time for a dinner-party they had previously issued invitations for, for that very evening. While Fane was away at barracks, hearing how things had been going on in his absence, Blanche, in the most becoming *robe de toilette*,

sat before her glass, submitting to the manipulation of her maid, a pretty girl of about one-and-twenty, who, with comb and brush, and some slight artificial assistance, was about to build up, out of the plentiful material before her, the particular kind of superstructure for the female head demanded by the fashion of the period. But, however becoming that soft golden hair might have been afterwards, when twisted into the required shape, it could not have been more so than when hanging down, as it did, in rich waves far below the slender waist, and half concealing the pretty face which occasionally peeped through its natural veil to see how the important operation was proceeding.

There is something in the dressing of hair which, for the time, lessens the barrier between mistress and maid, and of all times which the latter would choose when to gain a point, ask a favour, or retail a bit of gossip, it is then, when her lithe and plastic fingers can second the efforts of her tongue.

It is just the same with men. A hair-dresser can go farther, and be more familiar

with his customers, than any other tradesman; and it must be because his hands are always ready to tone down any liberty that the unruly member may take. He ruffles you up with his tongue, but he immediately smooths you down again with his hand. For instance, he remarks, "Your 'air is 'orribly thin on the top, sir!" on which, a scathing rebuke is on the tip of your tongue, when his hand descends, and softly strokes the thinly-clad part with a tenderness bordering on affection. The rebuff dies away unuttered; your wrath vanishes; you shut your eyes; and—if you were a cat, you'd purr. But, just let him try on any of his flippancy with you, when you are out of his hands, and your hat, firmly set on, protects your head from his magic touch, and he'll find you a very different man.

Blanche gave herself up to the influence of the moment, while the maid prepared to take advantage of its mysterious power.

Each had a secret which it was hard to keep from dwelling on, but the maid had much the best of it. There was no bitterness in *her* secret, no guilty consciousness in the possession of it, no occasion to be

ashamed of disclosing it. In fact, this last was what she was on the point of doing. But with the other it was very different. Hers was a secret which she dared not disclose to any one, hardly even to herself, and which she was always striving, with a painful, wearing struggle, to eject and shut out altogether from her heart.

The maid's colour kept coming and going as her secret kept coming up to her lips, and then fluttering back again, and utterly refusing to allow itself to be put into words at all, until all the precious opportunity was waning fast.

"If you please, ma'am," she said at last, with a crimson blush that prefaced her subject more meaningfully than words, "if you please, ma'am——" repeated the maid.

"Well, Merton, you've said that before," remarked Blanche Vereker, as she looked in the glass at the reflection of the face above her own head, and marked the blushes, and the simpering, and several other little symptoms which, to her womanly nature, divulged at once the character of the coming confidence.

"Well, ma'am—ahem!—I think it right to ask your advice—ahem!"

"There, now, Merton, you needn't distress yourself about entering into any explanations. It's an old story—you've fallen in love with some one who has fallen in love with you, and you're engaged, and wish to be married, and you ask my advice; which means, that you'll take it if it agrees with your own inclination, and you won't, if it doesn't. Dear, that's the worst of having a pretty maid! she is snapped up before you've time to look round."

This concluding remark was delivered with some asperity, which, however, was deprived of all point by the compliment which also accompanied it.

"Well, ma'am," said Merton, smiling, and, in her confusion, rather making hay of Blanche's hair, "that *is* what I was going to say."

"And who is—good gracious, Merton! what are you doing with my hair?"

"Oh, I beg pardon, ma'am, I'm sure," said the maid, re-arranging with penitent trepidation the structure in which the assistance ren-

dered by art had been made rather too palpable.

"And who is the person, Merton? I hope you're not throwing yourself away."

"Oh, no, ma'am, not at all; it's Sergeant Whitefield. He's spoken to the captain of his troop, who says he has no objection, only that the colonel says there's the regulated number of married people already in the regiment, and that he won't give any more leave. However, I was thinking if you'd be so good as to say a word or two to the colonel, he might think better of it."

"And who is his captain? Not Captain Gwyn, I hope, as there wouldn't be much encouragement to expect from *that* quarter."

"Oh, no, thank heaven, ma'am, it isn't Captain Gwyn! *he* looks upon a woman as so much dirt," said Merton, with a toss of her head. "Sergeant Whitefield says that if a man of Captain Gwyn's troop goes and asks his leave to get married, he flies at him like a madman. No, ma'am, it is Captain Bullekeley."

Captain Bullekeley! Somehow Blanche's

interest in the sergeant received quite a fillip at this piece of information.

"Captain Bullekeley, eh? And what did you say he said, Merton?" Tom's opinion on anything seemed to her worth repeating.

"Sergeant Whitefield says that he spoke kindly and heartily to him, as he always does, and said that he had no objection, and he'd do what he could with the colonel, who had been saying that there were enough married people in the regiment already."

"Very well, Merton. I'll also do what I can, and speak to Colonel Vereker about it."

"Thank you, ma'am, I'm sure."

The maid had gained her point. The next thing now was the little piece of gossip.

"Sergeant Whitefield, ma'am" — (everything was Sergeant Whitefield) — "says that the troop are in a terrible taking about losing Captain Bullekeley. They say——"

"Dear! I wish you'd be a little more careful, Merton. You ran the comb into my head, and made me start."

"Did I, ma'am? I beg your pardon, ma'am, I'm sure. I didn't mean to do it."

"Very well, Merton. But what was it you

were saying ? I forget. Oh, something about Captain Bullekeley, I think."

"Yes, ma'am ; he's going to leave the regiment. He's going to exchange. It's a sad piece of business for such an open-hearted, open-handed gentleman as Captain Bullekeley is, too."

"Turn down those lights, Merton ; I've rather a headache after travelling, and they annoy me. That'll do, thank you. What's so very sad about Captain Bullekeley ? Has anything happened to him while we've been away ?"

"Haven't you heard, ma'am ? He's lost all his money—it's quite like a novel. I always thought Captain Bullekeley looked like a hero of romance. A will has been found, ever so old, and all his money goes to some one else, and he's quite poor now, and he can't afford to stay in the regiment, and is going to exchange to an infantry one abroad. I don't know which will miss him most, the officers or the men, for Sergeant Whitefield says there isn't that mortal thing the men of the regiment wouldn't do for him ; and as to the men of the troop he says it's

quite taken all the go out of them, for they used always to fancy themselves a bit better than the other men, and rather look down upon them through having such a smart captain, who was always first and foremost in everything that was manly and sporting, and now they don't know what sort of an officer it will be who is coming from the other regiment. His men were more proud of him, I think, than his brother officers, and they talk now a lot of trying to get transferred in a body with him to his new regiment, which, of course, Sergeant Whitefield says, is all nonsense, and can't be done."

"Get me my handkerchief, Merton ; I think I must have caught a slight cold sitting in the carriage in the train with the windows open. Thank you."

"The men of his troop first heard of it through his servant, and at first they told him to go along, and that they wouldn't believe it ; but they were a bit uneasy in their minds, and thought there might be something in it, so they went to the Troop Sergeant-Major, and asked him to go straight to the Captain and ask him respectfully all about it, and

when the Sergeant-Major came back and said it was all true, Sergeant Whitefield says you'd have thought every man had lost his mother or his sweetheart, they were all so down at it, and that evening not one of them stirred out of barracks, but sat about talking, and moping in the barrack-rooms. And every one says it is so noble of him, for there wasn't any occasion for him to give up the property, but he won't keep it for a day from any one he thinks has a better right to it than himself, and he has given it up of his own free will. Ah, it's a lucky lady that gets Captain Bullekeley for a husband, rich or poor. Are you very tired, ma'am?"

The head under operation had been bending lower and lower for the last few moments, until at last the maid had asked her if she were tired.

"Dear me! I've been fast asleep—yes. What *have* you been talking about, Merton? There, that will do, very nicely. There's plenty of time. I'll sit down by the fire and rest a little, and ring when I want you. You can go now."

In another moment Blanche was alone,

and then, after denouncing herself passionately as a "weak-minded, miserable, wicked fool!" she leant against the bed and buried her head in the pillow, regardless of the elaborate hirsute structure just completed with so much skill and care.

When a woman is in tribulation and finds she is going to break down, she is much addicted to burying her face in pillows, partly to smother her feelings, and partly, it may be, because she is conscious of the unbecoming nature of the proceeding, and hides her face even from the bare walls, unwilling that even *they* should see her at such a disadvantage, for crying is unbecoming—terribly so, no matter what may be said to the contrary. Tears certainly may look pretty when they only just suffuse upturned eyes, or tremble on silken lashes, or even trickle down fair cheeks, and if these lachrymal effects would stop here, vanity would find no occasion for burying tearful faces in pillows, but, unfortunately, this is only the very first stage; the next, and inevitable one, is characterised by swollen eyelids, red nose-tips, and inflamed cheeks.

When Blanche raised her head from the pillow, the short struggle was over—at least to outward appearances—and the only traces it left were in the hair, which was slightly dishevelled. The application, however, of a brush soon remedied defects, and she sat down by the fire with the determination of taking herself severely to task for the way in which she had allowed all her resolutions to be swept away before the suddenness of the attack, and had laid down her arms without making any fight at all. •

She had barely commenced the self-imposed lecture, when there was a knock at the door, followed by the entrance of Fane Vereker, who had just returned from the barracks.

Blanche had been so engrossed in her contemplations that she had never heard his approaching footsteps, and her first thought on seeing him was, whether she would have to go through the ordeal of hearing, with nothing more than mere friendly concern, the whole story of Tom Bullekeley over again.

Fane kissed her, remarked she looked

rather tired, wished the coming guests "at the devil," in consequence, and threw himself into an opposite chair.

"By Jove, Blanche! who do you think we're going to lose in the regiment? The very last man I ever expected to leave the corps. You'll never guess."

"Well, then, I had better not try, Fane," was the quiet rejoinder.

"Tom Bullekeley. He's going to exchange. It's not arranged officially yet, or, of course, I should have known about it before, but he has told me he has written privately about it to that young Trevor at Gibraltar. He *will* be a loss to the regiment! By gad! Tom Bullekeley was a credit to us in every way! He's a thorough gentleman, a good officer—his troop's the best in the world—a good sportsman all round, and the life and soul of the mess. Damme! I was proud of having a fellow like Tom Bullekeley for one of my officers! And, as the song says, 'We'll never see his like again!'"

"Isn't it all very sudden, Fane?" asked Blanche, who had received the second

edition of the news with greater composure.

"Yes, I should think it was. It's come upon all the fellows like a clap of thunder, as I dare say the necessity for it has upon Tom himself."

And hereupon followed a description of the whole affair, as Fane had heard it in the ante-room at the barracks, after which he retired to dress for dinner.

The guests of the evening consisted of two or three neighbouring county families and a few officers of the regiment, and during nearly the whole of dinner, Tom's praises were being hymned on all sides.

"It's all very well," said Blanche to herself when she was once more alone in her room, the guests having departed, with the exception of the officers, who had adjourned to the smoking-room with Fane. "It's all very well my trying to drive him out of my thoughts. I declare it seemed to-night as if every one, Fane himself included, had been in league to prevent my forgetting for a moment how noble, how good, how beloved he is! The way those men spoke of him to-night shows

what he is ! I was the only one who did not join in rapturously in his praises, until one of them said to me that he didn't think Captain Bullekeley could be a very great favourite of mine. If he could only have known then that—— Ah, God have pity on me ! This seems a hopeless struggle. I thought I had succeeded nearly in driving him out of my thoughts, and so I should have done, I believe, if he had continued rich and prosperous and successful, with all the world at his feet. But *now* that he is poor and unfortunate, I *can't* shut him out. I like him now ten times as much as I did—God forgive me !"

And, with a sob, Blanche Vereker threw herself on her knees and prayed.

After the lapse of a few moments she rose, and, going to the nursery, wound her arm gently round her sleeping infant, and, placing her wet, flushed cheek against its little face, dropped off into a short doze.

The innocent little babe always acted as a sort of antidote to the poison which had crept into her soul, and when she awoke, there was comparative peace and quiet where all had been misery and heart-burning.

“I don’t think I should have given way like that,” she said, in a piteous little soliloquy, “if it was not that I am not as strong as I used to be.”

CHAPTER XVI.

LEADEN-EYED DESPAIR.

"O that 'twere possible,
After long grief and pain,
To find the arms of my true love
Round me again !"

Tennyson.



N the meantime, where was Fred Clennell ?

Although no allusion has been made to him for the last few chapters, the reader must not suppose that the question had not presented itself uneasily to his friends at Lissington times without number, as day after day passed, and there came no news of him.

Independently of all other reasons, his arrival amongst them would put things on a

more settled footing. May was certain that he would never supplant Tom in the Lissington property. He would be far too generous and noble for that, she felt sure.

But, after all, what was this consideration when weighed in the balance with his life, for which now sad fears were beginning to be awakened ?

He had been so long overdue that the gloomiest misgivings and forebodings could no longer be silenced.

Days passed slowly, and rolled into weeks, weeks into months, and still there came no tidings of the wanderer.

The hired troop-ship "Copenhagen" arrived at Portsmouth with Jessie Gibson on board, and Tom went down and brought the child up to May. Clennell had said, in his last letter to them, that, probably, this would not be until after his arrival. But the child settled down in her new home, and her advent amongst them was becoming quite a remote event—and *still* no news! There was nothing to give them fresh hopes, nothing to confirm their fears.

Little Jessie was never tired of extolling the

kindness of her benefactor. She would recount, in her childish tones, all the horrors of Purghatorree, and would tell May, with tears of gratitude flowing, how, in the midst of it all, Fred Clennell had always been so good and kind to "poor father and mother."

As May listened to all this, her heart would swell to bursting, as she thought how that kind and brave spirit had probably fled for ever.

The suspense was becoming painful beyond endurance. What *could* have happened to him?

Tom went to the Horse Guards, but no report had reached them. He then went to the office where the "returns" from all the regiments abroad were kept, and here official reserve and coldness were so melted by his genial, hearty manner, that two clerks, usually ice to the general public, were thawed into putting their nail-parers into their waistcoat pockets, and hunting up the last few "monthly returns" from Purghatorree. But these only showed "Lieutenant F. C. Clennell proceeded to England on medical certificate;" so that there was not much hope or information got out of *that*.

The telegraphic wires were called into requisition, but no hopeful messages ever came flashing back. The papers were scanned eagerly for the arrival of the Indian mails, and every item of the intelligence religiously read, even to all the jargon (to them) about *cotton twist*, *grey shirtings*, and *dhollera*, but nothing was there ever about the missing one.

As far as Alexandria there had been, of course, no difficulty in tracking him ; but here all traces of him were lost. Detectives were sent out, but they could learn nothing. Then Tom determined to go there, and prosecute inquiries on the spot himself. But what detectives, men accustomed all their lives to plotting and counter-plotting, could not achieve, is it likely that Tom Bullekeley, whose "utmost skill" in such matters was his "simple truth," could ? He went out, but in that busy place through which there is a constant stream of travellers perpetually flowing, no one was likely to recollect any particular one who may have stayed there a few hours or days.

"He was young, tall, military-looking, and with fair hair."

"A great many of them were that."

"He was an invalid, and, probably, looked ill and pale."

"The majority *did*."

"His name was Clennell—Frederick Cartaret Clennell. Was it entered in any of the hotel books?"

"No, it was not," was the reply in each case.

Tom searched himself, but without success, and for the very sufficient reason that Helstone had entered fictitious names.

Such was the barren result of Tom's inquiries, and he returned with hope almost dying out of even *his* hopeful nature.

Rewards, which went on increasing into small fortunes, were offered by Tom and his sister; but even a golden key failed to unlock the mystery.

The *Times* and other newspapers referred to the case in their columns; and then came the announcement, under the heading "the missing officer," that "the authorities at the Horse Guards and the War Office had decided that Lieutenant Clennell's name was to be struck out of the army list for the ensuing month."

His name "struck out!" Poor little May!

It seemed so cold, so unkind! It appeared to her almost as if they were not giving him enough chance. It seemed like slamming the door in the face of a poor, houseless wanderer!

Then the next, and last notice of him in the paper appeared in the "Gazette."

How icily cold, unfeeling, and formal it read! "—th Foot, Thomas Green, ensign, to be lieutenant without purchase, *vice* Frederick Carteret Clennell, missing, and struck off the strength."

When May read this, she rushed up to her room, and threw herself on her bed in a paroxysm of grief, while the words "Frederick Carteret Clennell, missing, and struck off the strength," seemed as if they were burning into her brain, and being branded on her heart in letters of fire.

The last hope seemed now to be gone. There was nothing but to make up one's mind that he had gone, *never* to return—that he was dead!

But how, when, where, under what circumstances? No one could tell. That was the

agonising part of it. That was the torturing doubt that would prevent the wound from ever healing.

Perhaps foully murdered! Perhaps—and, oh! it was dreadful to think of—perhaps, while she had been laughing and talking, the fearful struggle for that dear life had been going on!

“Or, perhaps, he may have met his end through some accident. Drowned! Shot by his own gun! Tumbled down a precipice! Fallen from his horse! But in any of these cases there would have been eye-witnesses; or, if not, he would have been missed, and search made for him at once on the spot. No, some fearful mystery hung over his disappearance.

It seemed so strange in this wonderful nineteenth century, this age of civilisation, when even time and distance were succumbing to science—when telegraphy had brought the nations of the earth so closely together, that Bombay was, in one sense, as near to London as Portsmouth used to be—when steam had become such a mighty agent in the hands of man that the elements warred almost in vain

against him—and when laws, national and international, spread such a mighty and protecting arm over society at large, that detection and punishment followed, swiftly and surely, on the footsteps of crime.

Yes, it was unaccountable and passing strange that, in the face of all this, a person should have disappeared without leaving any more trace behind him than if he had been spirited away to some unknown land.

There was nothing for May to do now but to torture her brain in this way, and to allow her imagination to run riot amongst the most fearful surmises and conjectures, until hope and happiness were crushed out of her, and she ceased to be the bright little May Chichester who, a few short months before, had won Kit Trevor's boyish affections.

Then there was another source of unhappiness ; Tom's exchange had been arranged, and he was to sail for Gibraltar in a week or ten days.

END OF VOL. II.

MILLING, PRINTER, GUILDFORD, SURREY.

